MAGIC EXCLUSIVE! THE WORLD'S FIRST LOOK AT MIRAGE THE NEW STAND-ALONE EXPANSION FOR MAGIC: THE GATHERING

arcane

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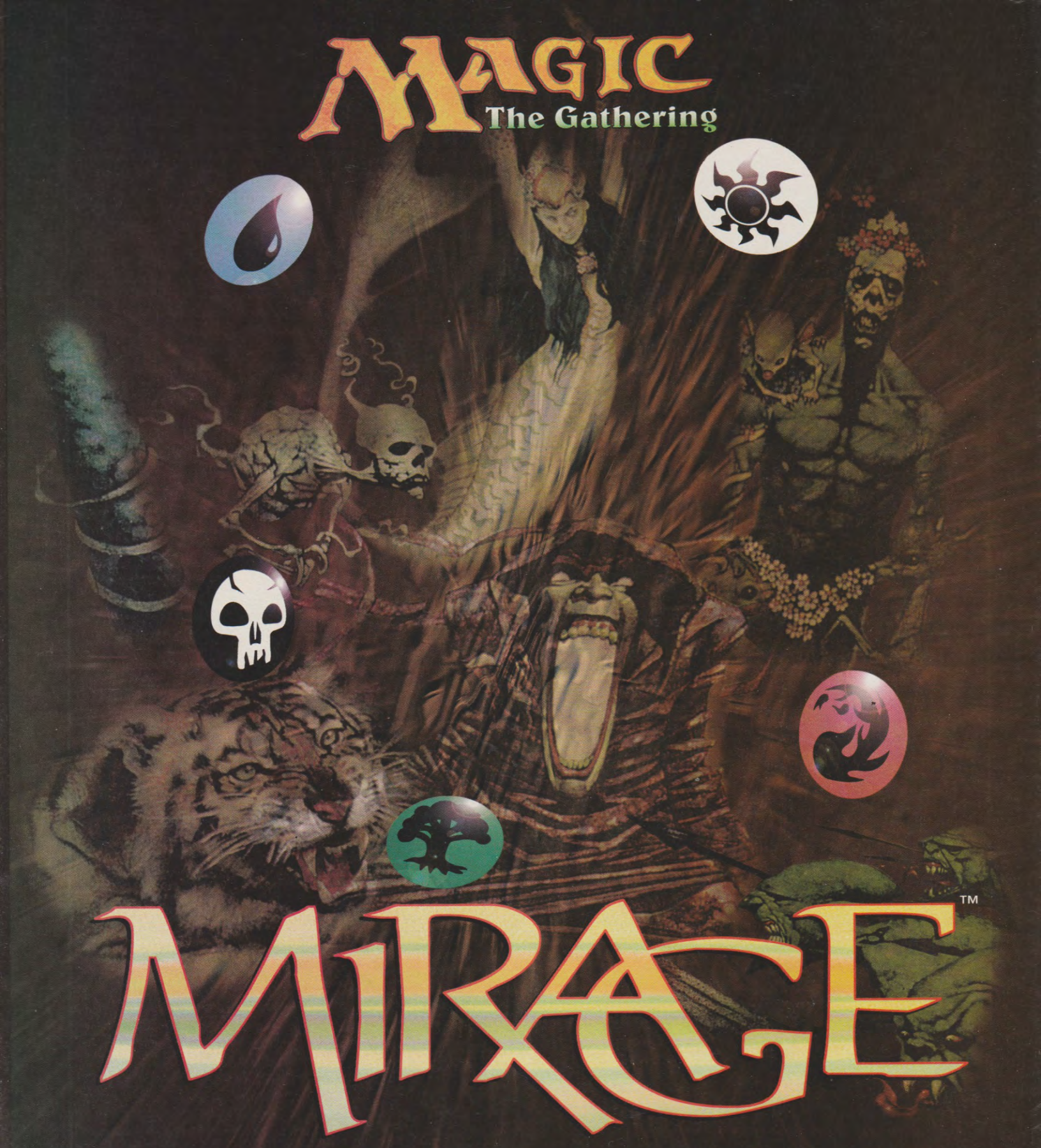

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MAGIC The Gathering

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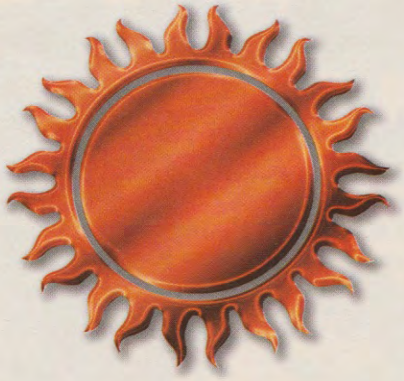

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arcane
30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Tel +44 (1225) 442244 Fax +44 (1225) 732252
e-mail arcane@futurenet.co.uk
web site http://www.futurenet.co.uk/

Paul Pettengale Editor
pettengale@futurenet.co.uk

Steve Faragher Consultant Editor

Andy Butcher Deputy Editor
abutcher@futurenet.co.uk

Maryanne Booth Art Editor

Jenny Price Design Assistant

Writers and Editorial
Dan Abnett, Mark Barter, Chris Baylis, Steve Faragher, Jim Flynn, Clare Johnson, Gideon Kibblewhite, Andy Lanning, Karen Levell, Phil Masters, Jonathan Palmer, Andrew Rilstone, Jim Swallow, Lucya Szachnowski, Ken & Jo Walton and Trenton Webb

Photography **Rick Buettner**

Illustration **David Atkinson, Paul Campion, Andrew Currie, Simon Gurr and Keith Jackson**

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If you're having trouble getting hold of **arcane** *contact...*
Tom Green Circulation Manager

If you would like to subscribe you should telephone 01225 822511. *fax* 01458 274378, *or write to*
arcane subscriptions
Future Publishing, Freepost BS4900
Somerton TA11 7BR

Advertising
Dominic Beaven Advertising Manager
dbeaven@futurenet.co.uk

Adrian Hill Classified Supervisor
ahill@futurenet.co.uk

Darren Pierce Sales Executive

Richard Bogie Business Development Manager

Business
Simon Stansfield Publisher
sstansfield@futurenet.co.uk
Liz Ramsay Publicity Manager
Tel 0171 331 3920

Overseas Licencing
Mark Williams
Tel 0171 331 3920 Fax 0171 331 3929

Management
Managing Director **Greg Ingham**
Chairman **Nick Alexander**

Production
Group Production Manager
Judith Green
Production Manager
Richard Gingell
Production Co-ordinator
Zoe Rogers
Print Services Manager
Matthew Parker
Paper Controller
Fiona Deane
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Jon Moore

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Future

This issue would have been impossible without...
WOMAD at Reading
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **Spearhead**

UP FRONT

Illustration Simon Gurr

We're off to GenCon in a couple of weeks' time. We'll be there to witness the release of loads of new roleplaying and collectable card game releases including the long-awaited *Dragonlance: The 5th Age* from TSR (the company's first new RPG for several years) and, of course, Marc Miller's *Traveller*.

As you can tell from this month's cover, we think the return of *Traveller* is a pretty bloody important event in the year's gaming diary. And so it is. After all, the original game was the first RPG many of us played after our initial forays into the worlds of *D&D*, and it was hugely saddening to see Games Designer's Workshop cease trading earlier this year. But yes, *Traveller* is back in an (almost) new incarnation, and we're going to tell you whether it's just as good as ever in our world exclusive review (starting on page 62). We've also been talking to Marc Miller himself about *Traveller*, its universe and everything else we thought you'd be interested in – so check out what Marc has to say in our lead feature, which starts on page 24.

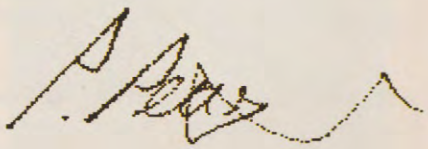
> "*Traveller* is back and we're going to tell you whether it's just as good as ever."

Before I go any further introducing you to this issue of **arcane**, I want to get you thinking about issue 14 – our special Christmas issue (yes, we do plan somewhat ahead of ourselves), and how you can help to shape it. If I were to ask you what your top ten RPGs of all time are, what would you reply (assuming, of course, that you've played as many as ten)? Have a think about it, and then write your answers down, in descending order from your most favourite RPG ever to your, well, tenth most favourite RPG ever, and send them to me (mark your envelope 'My Top Ten RPGs'). Why? Because we're going to be presenting you with the **arcane** readers' top 50 roleplaying games in the cover feature of issue 14, and we can't do that without your help. Of course, I don't expect you to go to all that effort without a chance of some payback. So, when we've collated all of the results (they must be with us by Monday 21st October), we'll put the entries in a suitably large hat and whoever sent in the one which is pulled first will win an even larger sack of games, cards, magazines and anything else we can manage to cram in. That ought to be incentive enough...

And, just so as you know well in advance, at the beginning of next year I'll be calling on your help once again, when we do the **arcane** reader awards in issue 17. What have been the best new roleplaying and CCG releases this year? Get thinking about it.

I seem to have taken up rather a lot of space already, so I guess you'll have to find out for yourself just how great this month's features are. Take it from me, they're well worth checking out.

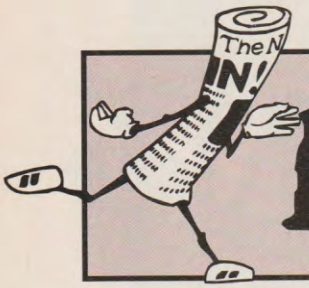
Which just leaves me enough space to encourage all of you to get your tickets for this year's EuroGenCon sorted out as soon as you can – the event is going to be massive this time around, and, of course, **arcane** will be there. We'll have a stand where you can come along, meet the team and buy the latest issue of the mag (which will be issue 11 – the first chance you'll have to get hold of it!). We want to get together with as many of you as we possibly can to play some demo games, and maybe battle it out with the old *Magic* and *Netrunner* cards. So get on the blower to TSR (☎ 01223 212517) and book your EuroGenCon tickets now – you know it makes sense.



Paul Pettengale
Editor

Into postal gaming? Then you'll want to check out our new regular column which covers all aspects of play-by-mail. It's written by PBM expert Matthew Green, you can find it on page 21, and over the coming months you'll be able to follow the **arcane** team members as they try their hands at various games. Oh, what fun.

What gets your goat? We've had a flood of entries for our rant column, On the Soapbox, but we're always after more. So, read this month's example, and then see if you can't put pen to paper yourself. Turn to page 19 for details.



DESPATCHES

Mirage makes its mark

The release of the next stand-alone expansion for *Magic: The Gathering* draws ever nearer...

The artwork for the *Mirage* cards is superb – this is from Goblin Elite Infantry.

THE NEXT BIGGEST thing to happen to *Magic: The Gathering* since, well, *Alliances* three months ago, is *Mirage*, the new 300+ card, stand-alone expansion set which is due to hit the shelves in October. The original release schedule has slipped by a month, but don't let the delay put you off – *Mirage* looks as if it's going to be just as revolutionary for the game as *Alliances* was.

One of the things promised with the *Mirage* set is another series of new game mechanics. *Ice Age*, the last stand-alone expansion, released in June of last year, introduced cantrips, Snow Covered Lands and the concept of cumulative upkeep – *Mirage* will be giving us more 'new' game rules, with the intention of bringing yet more strategy and even more variation to the world's most popular CCG. The two additional rules of key import are new abilities (like Banding and Landwalk). They're called Flanking and Phasing, and here, for the first time, are these essential additional rules, as released by Wizards of the Coast.

Flanking: Flanking is an ability which gives an advantage to attacking creatures. Whenever a creature without flanking is assigned to block a creature with flanking, the blocking creature gets -1/-1 until end of turn. For example, Bob attacks Sue with a Mesa Pegasus (1/1, banding) and a Mtenda Herder (1/1, flanking) and forms them into a band. Sue assigns her Grizzly Bears to block the Herder; because the Bears don't have flanking, they get -1/-1 until end of turn. She also assigns a Scryb Sprites to block the Pegasus, but the Sprites don't get -1/-1 until end of turn, because they were assigned to block the Pegasus rather than the Herder.

"Expect there to be some serious creatures stomping through..."

Phasing: Phasing causes permanents to enter and leave play on their own. When a permanent phases out, it leaves play and is set aside, much as if it had been removed from the game. Any enchantments on the permanent phase out along with it. The permanent also keeps any counters it has as well as any permanent changes that have been made to it. Otherwise, all effects that depend on the permanent being in play, or that apply to it while it's in play, end immediately. All damage on it is removed, and because it's considered out of play, any effects scheduled to affect it at end of turn are ignored.

A permanent that's phased out will phase in (that is, return to play) at the beginning of its controller's next untap phase. Note that it might or might not enter play under the control of that player, because only effects that gave control of it to someone permanently will remain on it when it phases out. When a permanent phases in, it enters play tapped if and only if it was tapped when it phased out. (In other words, it enters play tapped as appropriate instead of entering play untapped and then becoming tapped.) Effects which would normally trigger as the permanent comes into play are ignored. Permanents phase in without

That's the way to do it

UK National finalists reveal their *Magic* deck formulae.

Ergh. That's what we said when we discovered that we'd made an insy-winsy mistake last issue when we said that Oliver Schneider won the UK *Magic: The Gathering* National final and that Rob Salmon came second. Reversing those names would have been a good idea, because, of course, it was Mr Salmon who proved himself to be the big fish in the *Magic* arena (sorry).

To make up for the fact that we're incompetent upon occasion, we thought you'd enjoy this. Not particularly interesting reading, it has to be said, but if you want to be next year's *Magic* master and find yourself winging your merry way to Seattle to take part in the World Finals, then study these decks hard...

Rob Salmon's Winning Deck

10	Forest
4	Mishra's Factory
10	Plains
4	Strip Mine
2	Icy Manipulator
1	Nevinyrral's Disk
1	Zuran Orb
3	Birds of Paradise
2	Elvish Archers
4	Erhnam Djinn
3	Lhurgoyf
2	Spectral Bears
2	Sylvan Library
1	Balance
2	Disenchant
2	Land Tax
2	Serra Angel
4	Swords to Plowshares
2	Wrath of God

Side-Board

1	Feldon's Cane
2	Lifeforce
2	Pale Bears
2	Primal Order
2	Whirling Dervish
2	Conversion
2	Disenchant
1	Order of the Sacred Torch
1	Wrath of God

Ollie Schneider's Almost Winning Deck

1	Brushland
4	City of Brass
4	Karplusan Forest
4	Mishra's Factory
7	Mountain
3	Plains
4	Strip Mine
4	Barbed Sextant
1	Black Vise
1	Feldon's Cane
1	Ivory Tower
4	Nevinyrral's Disk
1	Zuran Orb
4	Erhnam Djinn
2	Earthquake
3	Fireball
4	Incinerate
4	Lightning Bolt
1	Orgg
1	Balance
2	Blinking Spirit
2	Land Tax
2	Stormbind

Side-Board:

3	Gloom
2	Red Elemental Blast
3	Shatter
2	Circle of Protection:Red
3	Swords to Plowshares
2	Reclamation

summoning sickness. A permanent with phasing phases out automatically at the beginning of its controller's untap phase, at the same time as other permanents would be phasing in. It doesn't phase out on the turn in which it phased in.

If a token phases out, it's removed from the game entirely, because it has left play.

One of the things that has immediately grabbed us about the *Mirage* cards we've seen so far is the quality of the art – our only real criticism of *Alliances* was that the art quality was variable in the extreme, and downright dodgy at times. Wizards of the Coast seems to have got itself completely sorted out on this score now because, as you can see from the cards illustrated here, the artwork is simply stunning.

And expect there to be some pretty serious creatures stomping their way through the *Mirage* set... A certain member of the UK Wizards of the Coast crew suggested to us that if we were to see a creature that, when brought into play, requires you to sacrifice other creatures with a total of 13 points of casting cost, but which itself is a 13/13 Trampler, then we shouldn't be surprised. Ouch. Thank God for Reprisal. Call Wizards of the Coast on 0345 125599 for more details.

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MIRAGE GREAT GIVEAWAY MAGIC The Gathering™

Get THREE CARDS from the forthcoming *Mirage* set for *Magic: The Gathering*

And besides...

Ravenous for games

Not satisfied with merely creating and casting high-quality fantasy and science-fiction figures, Harlequin Miniatures is now also about to launch its first game. *Raven* is a tabletop miniatures battle system of a fantasy bent, with full rules for magic and a sample scenario to help get you started. The rules provide for small skirmishes (using no more than a couple of dozen figures), right up to full-scale wars (using thousands, if you're rich enough to own that many). Contact Harlequin on 0115 942289.

More from Manga

The August release schedule has reached the office from those prolific people at Manga. This month you should be looking out for *Bubblegum Crash: Illegal Army - Part 1*, which is supposed to be about a group of female vigilantes who are set on clearing the streets of crime. Strange, then, that it features four semi-naked teenage girls lying on a bed on the cover. The mind boggles. Also hitting the shelves of your local video store will be *3x3 Eyes: Part 3*, *Violence Jack 2 - Hell's Wind* and *The Guyver: Parts 5-8*.

Be trekked out

Star Trek. Don't you just love it, eh? Oh you do? Then you'll be positively glued to your screen come 26th August, the night which BBC2 is calling *Star Trek* Night. Kicking off with the first episode of *Voyager* (which will be the first screening on terrestrial TV), the evening then proceeds to get silly with a piece on *Star Trek* fans, *The Star Trek Story*, *Spoof Trek* (oh yes, we kid you not), and *Funk Me Up Scotty*. God knows what the last one's about. Check your regional listings for times as the night draws nearer.

In the neck

UK Masquerade, a company which you may be familiar with because its contact details can be found in the Clubs section of our free Reader Ads each month (see page 88), is happy to announce that it's done tremendously well, and is now on the lookout to help new LARP groups set up *Vampire: The Masquerade* sessions. If you're interested, write to: UK Masquerade, 5 Hillside, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 2EB.

And besides...

Can't you work any FASA?

There's been much excited murmuring and lip-biting anticipation in gaming circles about the forthcoming *Shadowrun* companion *Beyond the Shadows*. But the waiting will soon be over. Offering the latest developments of the *Shadowrun* rules system, this new companion covers fluctuating magic levels, technological developments and also incorporates some interesting new roleplaying guidelines for adventurers in this futuristic fantasy universe. Meanwhile in magical Barsaive, adventures should be in plentiful supply as another war seems inevitable. The *Earthdawn* land has been relatively peaceful since the attempted Theran invasion, but times are changing at an ever-increasing pace, and the key events that may well lead to fresh conflict are comprehensively covered in *Prelude to War*, the new sourcebook for *Earthdawn*. Both these FASA publications will now come out in October and will be priced at around £10 each. FASA is on 001 312 243 5660.

The aliens are coming, again

The 2nd edition of New Millenium Entertainment's *Conspiracy X* has been shipped. An eight-page index and rules errata are included, and it has also been properly proof-read for spelling mistakes. An increased volume of copies is headed for the British Isles, so fans should have less difficulty in obtaining a copy this time round.

Daedalus dawdling

More delays in the release of *Flashpoint*, Daedalus Entertainment's new CCG. Muttering excuses about fires at the printing plant and missed 'production windows', President José Garcia says the game should be available in August, but in the meantime selected gaming stores and tournaments will receive appetisers of what promises to be the best-looking Daedalus product yet.

Murderers in Montreal

Canada, the 1920s – those who would rid the world of Cthulhu gradually unearth horrors in Québec. *Horror's Heart* is Chaosium's new *Call of Cthulhu* adventure, and one which should keep even the most experienced of investigators busy for a while with its puzzles, traps and multiple murders. Novices may also find this adventure a good place to start playing *CoC*, because there is considerable allowance for characters to find their bearings before they start going mad.

Fading Suns

Newcomer Holistic Design aims to bring a new vision to science fiction gaming.

Holistic Design is putting the finishing touches to its first release, a science fiction roleplaying game called *Fading Suns*. Set in the sixth millennium, *Fading Suns* describes a universe on the brink of total collapse. Mankind's greatest civilisation, a vast galaxy-spanning republic, has fallen into terrible decay, and a new Dark Age has begun. The only hope for humanity is the new Emperor, who has sworn to re-unite all human worlds under his banner.

But the Emperor faces many enemies – noble Houses intent on grabbing power for themselves, the various sects of the Church of the Celestial Sun who fear a leader whom they can't control, merchant Guilds which now dominate trade as well as commerce, and care only about making more and more money for themselves, hostile alien races and barbarian raiders from the very edges of space.

Fading Suns enables players to create characters from any of these myriad factions, dedicated to either aiding or opposing the Emperor in his quest. The game promises vicious combat, deadly politics, strange technology, alien artifacts and much more, and should be released in August.

Interestingly, as well as roleplaying games, Holistic Design is also intending to publish computer games for the PC. As well as working on the first officially licensed computer game based on Games Workshop's *Epic* wargame, a strategy game based on the *Fading Suns* universe – *Empire of the Fading Suns* – is also in development, due for release in November.

Look out for more news about these forthcoming games and a full review of *Fading Suns* in the next issue of **arcane** (out on Friday 6th September). Holistic Design is on 001 770 934 9131.

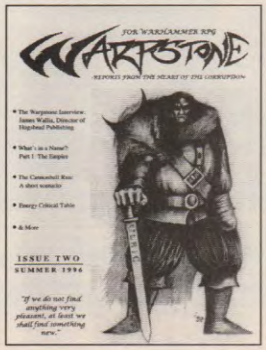
Who is Holistic Design?

Although Holistic Design is a new company, the people behind it – Bill Bridges, Andrew Greenberg, Ed Pike and Ken Lightner – are experienced designers. The first two will probably be familiar names for White Wolf fans as the developers of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* respectively, with credits for nearly 100 books between them. Ed and Ken, on the other hand, are both award-winning computer game designers.

The chaos continues

From Clapton comes the second issue of the *WFRP* fanzine...

The second issue of the rather splendid *Warpstone* has washed ashore in the **arcane** office, along with the knowledge that a great many of you snapped up the first issue of this A5 (though rather meaty) fanzine for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* enthusiasts. You'll be glad to hear, then, that the second issue covers more of the same, with scenarios, rules additions and musings on all things 'woof-ruup' (as we affectionately refer to the classic fantasy roleplaying system here in the office).



John Foody, the editor, has asked us to clarify the pricing policy for his output, so, here goes: issue two of *Warpstone* costs £2.50 in the UK, £2.75 across Europe, £3.50 in the States, and £3.75 anywhere else in the world. Prices include postage and packing. Oh, and John's still got copies of issue one available, so you can pick it up if you managed to miss it a couple of months back. Write and send cheques (made payable to J Foody) to: *Warpstone*, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5.

COMING SOON

Birthright

The *AD&D* campaign setting makes it on to the PC as a stand-alone RPG.

If you play *AD&D*, then the *Birthright* setting needs almost no introduction. Of course, not all of you play *AD&D*, so... The *Birthright* campaign has the players each in control of dominions, handed down to them through their bloodline (and the bloodlines were created following a pretty severe battle at the end of which the heroes who had partaken were all imbued with the power of the gods, no less). Because the strength which has been imbued within your bloodline is effectively a gift, and not natural, that strength can in fact be stolen, so it's worth looking after yourself.

Got that? Good. Got a PC? Even better, because the *Birthright* setting has been transformed into an *AD&D* PC RPG by Sierra, and it's due to be with us just before Christmas. The game mingles 'traditional' roleplaying (ie, wanding around with a party of people solving puzzles and stealing all sorts of stuff) with a strategy wargaming element. You effectively control your whole kingdom, commanding regiments of armies, the various guilds and the priesthoods to do your bidding and to, with any luck, become the most powerful bloodline in the game.

Additionally, *Birthright* will have built-in multiplayer and Internet-based play, so you can compete with up to seven other players for the domination of the dominion. The action is turn-based, and thus it should work a treat over the Net. Sure, you're going to need a pretty hefty PC to run the game in multiplayer mode (a Pentium is definitely recommended), but if you've got the power, it should be excellent fun.

Look for *Birthright* from Sierra ☎ 01734 303322 in November. It comes on CD-ROM and a Mac version is planned.

Seymour J Clancy III's great outing

In which Seymour realises he has to go undercover, to infiltrate and to destroy from within...

Ah have inflamed mah say-elf of the true naychure of the world bah reading *The Daily Mail* – and ah must share my frustrations that mah warnings concerning the dangers of so-called 'roleplaying games' remain, in many quarters, UNHEEDED. Ah have al-rayedy confronted Quentin Tarantino in the magazine that is the **arcane** 5, ahem, and now ah fahnd that he was not alone in playing this perverted games, that he was duelling with JOHN TRAVOLTA out of Greece – lahk Alan Bates and Oliver Reed in *Women in Love*, ah imagine – for, wahl they were filming *Pulp Fiction*, the double-dealing dogs did dodge off to thay-are domiciles to dole out the dice in the deliberations of "Dogmatic Directors & Disco Dancers".

Ah have always been devoted to Mister Travolta since his sultry swaying in the film *Sadderday Naht Live* – to which ah have al-rayedy deluded in the magazine that is called the **arcane** 3, ahem, but now ah know that ah have but one racehorse to save the hunky heart-throb... bah impressionating a roleplayer MAH SAY-ELF.

To rescue, therefore, the big-lipped boy of protruberant pectorals, ah have personably deranged mah owen *demarché*, in which I shall deviously debouch as a denizen into the *de luxe* demythologizations of *Dungarees and Dole Queues*, and deracinate, *Deo volente*, this decerebrated deliria to the end of depurating bah decoction... *(Oh please... – Ed.)*

You can tell by the way he uses his walk that Shane Horan of Antrim is a woman's man, no time to talk. You would also be correct in assuming that he has an **arcane** T-shirt, or two. Want one? Denounce famous roleplayers. Do it now – before it's too late.

Conventions

The main events taking place over the next few months.

Convention diary

25th August
Soldiers of Fortune

Of the Wizards of the Coast sanctioned Duelists' Convocations this summer, this is the only sealed deck tournament. It starts in Oldham at noon and costs £15 to enter. Call: ***Peter Ward*** on ☎ **0161 6260084**. Other tournaments take place in London, Edinburgh, Worthing, Exmouth and Shrewsbury. We suggest you call **Wizards** (UK) on ☎ **0141 2265666** to get the contact number for a tourny near you.

21st September
Star Wars Live Action

Requests for further information and applications to go to London and take part in this non-profit making event should be accompanied by an sae and sent to: ***Star Wars* Live Action,** 20 Beaumont Avenue, North Harrow, Middlesex HA2 7AT before August 31st. Alternatively, e-mail: jamess@dircon.co.uk or check out the Web site at: http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~jamess/index.htm

22nd September Spelbreker

Belgium's biggest gaming festival, now in its third year. Tickets 100bf. Contact: ***Johan & Joachim François***, Wilhelmpark 7, 9900 Eeklo, Belgium, ☎ **+32 9 3781265, fax +32 9 3781370**, or contact: ***De Media,*** *Molenstraat 165, 9900 Eklo, Belgium,* ☎ **+32 9 3779394, fax: +32 9 3783678**, e-mail: De Media@hookon.be, Web site: http://www.hookon.be/De Media

26-28th October Gaelcon 96

The Irish Games Association's 8th International Convention, takes place at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin. Contact: ☎ **+353 1 7012359**, e-mail: droe@telecom.ie Web: http://indigo.ie/~renraku/gaelcon.html

8-10th November
Clan Amber 96

Residential convention for the diceless RPG *Amber* at the Holiday Inn Garden Court, Edinburgh. **Nicky & Alan Cannon** ☎ **0131 4476124**, 70/5 Craighouse Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 5UN

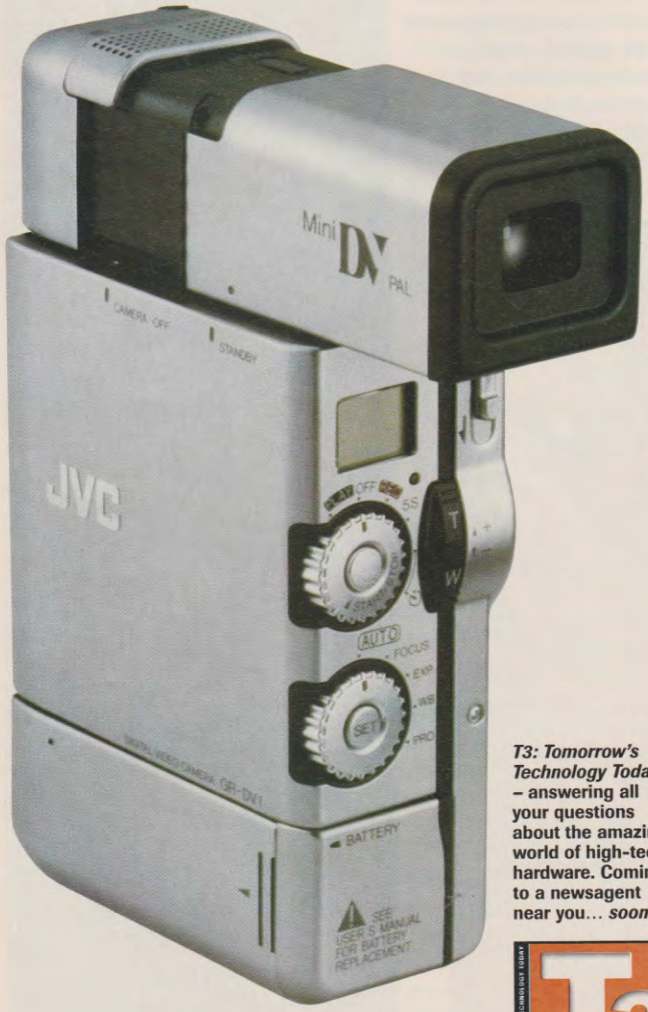
What the *hell* is this?

Is it...

A A wallet-sized discreet surveillance and listening device?

B A low-powered laser display for projecting 3D imagery?

C A super-portable digital video camcorder with 100x digital zoom?



T3: Tomorrow's Technology Today **– answering all your questions about the amazing world of high-tech hardware. Coming to a newsagent near you... *soon.***

T3

A new magazine from the makers of AMIGA FORMAT

The Greens against the Greys

A major new release for *Call of Cthulhu* is set to teach the *X-Files* a thing or two about conspiracy...

Could it be said that Lovecraft wrote the very first *X-Files?* No, probably not, but the Cthulhu mythos does lend itself to modern-day conspiracy theory. Rather than the truth being 'out there', it's 'down there' on sunken R'lyeh, waiting for its moment to shine (and of course to eat people). Not surprising, then, that Pagan Publishing is soon to release its *Delta Green* sourcebook – a 240-page tome dedicated to telling the tale of an ultra-secret sub-organisation within the US Government which knows The Truth, and is doing its damnedest to make absolutely sure that no-one else stumbles upon its not-so-little secret.

The Delta Green agency is highly illegal, according to US and International law, and yet it continues to operate, attempting to defeat the mythos and alien threat which could overthrow man's domination of the Earth. But Delta Green has got more than Cthulhu and his minions for an enemy. There is another secret organisation, MAJESTIC-12, which has been working for years with an alien race, the infamous Greys, and which is set on revealing the Delta Green's position and on aiding the Greys in their own agenda for Earth's future. But, of course, MAJESTIC-12 doesn't know what the Greys *really* are...

All this sounds, to us at least, like a cracking good supplement for 1990s *CoC* horror gaming. Yes, it smacks of *Conspiracy X*, and *Don't Look Back* for that matter (and of course they all smack of the *X-Files),* but Pagan Publishing is keen to point out that this is no bandwagon it's jumping on – it's been working on the *Delta Green* background for more than three years now. Before, in fact, the first *X-Files* was ever screened on American TV.

We can expect to see *Delta Green* appearing in the shops in time for late autumn. Stay tuned with **arcane** for the full, definitive review in a couple of issue's time.

COMPO WINNERS

Biologically improbable mythical beasts

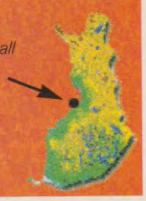
Stephane Bura of Paris, P Darby of Canterbury, Steve Di Prima of New Jersey, Fritz Goldhoorn of Utrecht, Dave Kerner of Hampstead, Mark Langford of Beccles, Mick Murphy of Cork, Chris Palmer of Cardiff, Danny Whitaker of Camden Town and Neil Worley of Wycombe.

That deck's mine!

David Clark of Bishop Auckland wins a ProTour Magic *deck.*

Eat lead, twisted demon-cyborg scum

Fredrik Andersson of Umeå, Chris Coffey of Deal, Sean Holland of Carus, Oregon, Tim Payne of Swansea and Mikko Uusitalo of Pattijoki, which is a small town of some 5,000 inhabitants in the beautiful Finnish countryside.



Feudal Vassalage? No, thank you

Treachery and valour in White Wolf's *Rage* expansion set.

The largest ever expansion set for *Rage*, the CCG based on *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* will be available in September. White Wolf's new 210+ card collection will allow players to meet Lord Albrecht's old rival Margrave Konietzko, as well as providing the opportunity to renew the acquaintance of some more familiar characters. There is also an exciting new card type included which affects other cards in its deck in strange and interesting ways.

Insurgency is growing against the usurping Silver Fangs after they have been seen to have repaid courage and valour with unscrupulous treachery. The Konietzkos ascended the throne three generations ago on the back of the labour of others, and those others would now say that the Silver Fangs have only proved themselves incompetent in their control of power. Now, the time for toadying vassalage has past and the ruling Konietzko family looks set to get it in the neck.

The new supplement will, as usual, be printed in limited edition by the Upper Deck Company. A booster pack should cost less than £1.50, while a box of 24 booster packs will retail at around £30. White Wolf can be contacted on 001 404 292 1819.

Betrayal in Antara

Save the magical empire of Antara with this forthcoming release for the PC.

Where Gods prevail and magic is a reality. Not a reference to Highfield Road (sorry foreign readers – that's the home ground of Coventry City football club, who are not particularly successful, but we love 'em), but to the land of Antara, the setting for a new 3D fantasy PC RPG from Sierra, due for release in November. An anti-magic rebellion has rocked the land, the Emperor is desperately trying to consolidate his position and only you can help. Well, the band of four adventurers you control as you get embroiled in an ever-increasingly complex plot and political intrigue.

The game will feature a full 3D perspective which takes you through hundreds of locations, what's described as "a strategic combat" system, high-res graphics and an innovative magic system. We'll be reviewing it later in the year. Sierra is on 01734 303322.

Rilstone's Realm

Scary but true – regular **arcane** columnist and editor of *Interactive Fantasy* Andrew Rilstone has struck a deal with Hogshead Publishing whereby he will now control all aspects of editorial and business for the roleplaying magazine he co-founded. Previous publishers, Hogshead Publishing, will continue to support *Interactive Fantasy* by representing it at conventions, but James Wallis of Hogshead believes he can no longer guarantee the attention the magazine requires. Andrew's vision is to target sales through subscription and mail order, but issue five should also be available in games shops this autumn.

Look, we're sorry, okay

Last month our 'Forging Alliances' feature said that Balduvian War-Makers have Trample. This is not true, though the combo still works. Wizards of the Coast can rest assured that the offending editor was strung up to the ceiling fan by his bootlaces. Then we turned the fan on. Don't try that at home, though. We're professionals, we know what we're doing.

Famous for 15 minutes

Astronauts on future missions to Mars will play "co-operative" games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* during their two-year flight, according to an article published on the front page of *The Independent* on Friday 19th of July. The NASA directive follows a recent incident on Mir, when chess matches had to be totally banned from the Russian space station after two players argued when their weightless pieces wandered off the board in the zero-G. So, with *Warhammer* obviously out of the question, and the political overtones of a *BattleTech* campaign well noted, Houston-based space psychologist Dr JoAnna Wood has gone for *D&D*.

She believes that a fantasy campaign run in outer space will help the crew overcome the inevitable interpersonal problems resulting from living together in a small tin can for so long without the option of going down the pub.

We at **arcane** can't help wondering whether *Star Wars*, with its off-the-peg character generation system, mightn't be a more appropriate place for novices to start, before perhaps moving on to *Call of Cthulhu*, where the 1/1d8 SAN loss for seeing a Martian might prove to be a cloud with a silver lining later on – but JoAnna's obviously a strict *D&Der* and it's her game.

Anyway, for alert reporting, Phil Campbell of Nottingham and Peter Griffith of Bromsgrove both win themselves a coveted **arcane** T-shirt.

Do you want one, too? Tell us where you've seen roleplaying make the news and you never know, that T-shirt could be yours. Write in to us at:

15 Minutes, arcane,
30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW

And if NASA are short of DMs, our e-mail address is: arcane@futurenet.co.uk

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Goblin, goblin, gone!

arcane COMPO

Good home wanted for friendly goblin. Never any trouble and certainly not mischievous or wicked at all, ever. Quite the opposite, in fact. Genuine reason for getting rid of the little runt, ahem, perfectly harmless, inanimate hand-puppet supplied by Cuckoo's Nest Enterprises (**arcane** 8). Write to **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW marking your application 'No, I have a headache'.

Rules of combat

1. Competition ends 31st October 1996.
2. Multiple entries are strictly prohibited, anyone found guilty will be visited by the goblin's dad, and he's ten times as big.
3. The editor is the Goblin King. He controls the mountains, the lands beyond and the land in between. Anyone who questions the Goblin King will be punished. And that's not a fun experience.

Out with the old

And in with the new, with the dumping of *Bushido,* and the arrival of *Sengoku.*

As we've previously reported in the Despatches pages of **arcane**, Gold Rush Games plans to release a completely revamped version of *Bushido* (the classic feudal Japanese RPG which was previously owned by FGU and which has been out of print for many years). It has, however, fallen into legal problems, with FGU (represented by Scott Bizar) threatening to take legal action if the game goes to the presses. It comes as little surprise, then, to hear that Gold Rush Games has scrapped the *Bushido* project (stating: "Our interest is in producing games, not in pursuing legal action"), but is instead going to be releasing a completely new feudal Japanese RPG by the name of *Sengoku* (which means 'warring states').

Mark Arsenault, president of Gold Rush, is evidently making a big effort to prove that *Sengoku* is a new system, and not merely *Bushido* under a different name. He comments: "We're developing the system from the ground up so we have a great opportunity to create a game system that reflects the chambara genre." We look forward to seeing how the game develops over the coming months.

Bright lights, big city

To support the release of its first product, the board game *City of Chaos* (reviewed this issue), Monocle Games has provided us with five copies for our readers. So, if you can answer the question, one could be yours.

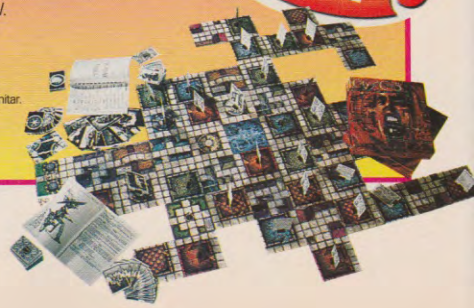
arcane COMPO

Q Which city bridges Europe with Asia?

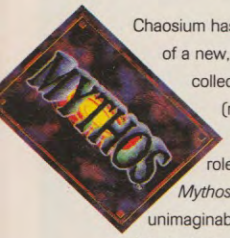
Answers to 'Gone to my baby's head', **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

By-laws:

1. Curfew: 31st October 1996.
2. Monocle or Future folk aren't welcome in Byronitar.
3. All multiple entries shall be cast to the litter-strewn, backstreets.
4. The editor is the mayor.



Unlimited terror from Chaosium



Chaosium has announced the imminent release of a new, unlimited edition of its popular collectable card game, *Mythos* (reviewed in **arcane** 7). Based on the company's classic horror roleplaying game, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Mythos* pits players against the unimaginable forces of the Great Old Ones, evil beings who once ruled the Earth, and are dedicated to regaining their previous glory (at considerable expense to us puny mortals).

The new edition of the game will be sold in starter packs of two 52-card decks, which are playable straight out of the box. It will be completely compatible with *Mythos* limited edition and the upcoming *Mythos Dreamlands* set. Look out for it in October. Chaosium can be contacted on ☎ 001 510 547 7681.

Blood Wars called to a halt?

TSR has announced that it is suspending production of its *Blood Wars* CCG "until further notice". The game, based on the successful Planescape setting for the *AD&D* RPG, was released last year, and was the company's second CCG (the first, *Spellfire*, was released in 1994). Three expansion sets – *Insurgents of the Inner Planes*, *Weapons & Warmongers*, and *Hand of Fates* – were planned for *Blood Wars* this year.

The reasons for the sudden decision have not been explained, although distributors have pointed to the game's lacklustre sales in comparison with *Spellfire* and *Dragon Dice*. Whether production of the game will be resumed remains unclear. TSR is on ☎ 01223 212517.

Star Wars taped

We've got three sets of *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back* from Hodder Headline Audiobooks' production of the original radio dramatisation of the trilogy. And we'll get three sets of *The Return of the Jedi* when it's out in October. Normally, each double tape, of which there are three per film, would cost you £9 – but, in association with Joy Sapieka Associates, we're going to give you some for free. But first:

Q When's the next *Star Wars* film due out?

Send an envelope with '1998' written on it to:

arcane COMPO

'You really don't have to do this to impress me', **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

Rules of combat

1. Competition ends 31st October 1996.
2. Multiple entries and those from employees of Hodder, Sapieka and Future will be sent hurtling into the void, never to be seen again.
3. The editor commands a space station the size of a moon. From this, he surveys and controls his kingdom, while dealing with all matters of trash disposal, such as rebels, illegal competition entries, etc.

CARD OF THE MONTH

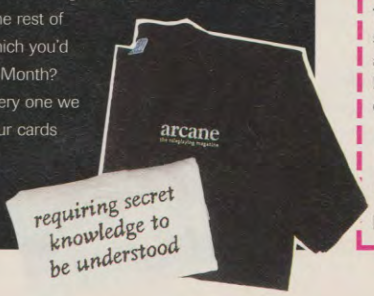
Mot's Advice

EVENT
STAR TREK
THE NEXT GENERATION
MOT'S ADVICE
Mr. Mot offered sage advice to his customers on a variety of subjects, but there was only one thing you could really learn from him.
Plays on any one personnel. While in play, that personnel gains the skill of Barbering.

Now, however much being able to give someone a decent haircut might be a valuable skill in real life (it would save me a fortune – my wife's hair costs a good £20 a time), it does strike the team as being a somewhat curious skill with which to imbue a character in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* CCG. I don't know, maybe the ability to make others fashionable is a social ability par excellence in the dim and distant future, but as far as the game is concerned, it does seem to us to be fashionably pointless.

Our thanks to Leigh Caple for sending in the card – a T-shirt is on its way to you (right now). And the rest of you! What cards have you got which you'd like to see appear in Card of the Month? There's an **arcane** T-shirt for every one we print, and we promise to send your cards back to you, even if they're Serras.

Send your wacky cards to: Card of the Month, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW.



next month in arcane

PUT YOUR SHADES ON

We're off to discover the world of cyberpunk in next month's lead feature. What is it, where has it come from and which of the many cyberpunk games should you be playing? We'll be taking a look at the fiction, the cyberpunk myths and the possibilities for adventure in this grim dark future.

ON THE WIRE

Have you ever dabbled in roleplaying over the Internet? If not, why not? As we set out to demonstrate in **arcane** II it's great fun, and it's cheaper than you may think!

yOU'rE bOnkERs yOU!

Insanity is an essential ingredient for many roleplaying games, but just how do you go about playing a completely loopy character? Find out in our next issue!

Plus, our superlative mix of reviews, features and news, and three free cards from the new *Mirage* set for *Magic: The Gathering!*

arcane II will be on sale Friday 6th September

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COLUMN

Strange new worlds...

Roleplaying games are all about exploring fascinating and often bizarre imaginary worlds... or are they?

ANDREW RILSTONE

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

THESE DAYS, 'A NEW roleplaying game' means – for all practical purposes, at least – a new roleplaying *setting*. We're looking forward to *Babylon Project* because we want to roleplay in the world of *Babylon 5;* we are pleased Marc Miller is reviving *Traveller* (see our review starting on page 62) because we are especially interested in the Imperium and the Spinward Marches. The question of whether these games will use D6s or D10s really is a secondary consideration. It's strange to think that *D&D* and *Traveller* started life with no official background whatsoever. Back in those days, if you wanted a gameworld, you had to use your imagination and make one up.

The writers of new RPGs usually claim that their world is more original, more believable and more fantastic than anything we've ever come across before. Unfortunately, it often turns out to be just one more collection of fantasy clichés, with elves in the forests, dwarves in the mountains, orcs in the caves and short people with furry feet in Surrey.

It's not a coincidence that two of the best-loved and most durable fantasy settings avoided going down this 'cod fantasy' root. Much of Glorantha (the setting for Chaosium's *Runequest)* takes its inspiration from the Byzantine empire and the Native Americans, while Tekumel (the setting for *Empire of the Petal Throne)* is Chinese, Aztec and alien. Both worlds attract fanatical adherents – I know of people who play *EPT* to the exclusion of all other games, people who have learned the Tsolyani language and who try to put the land's honour code into practice in their own lives. Both worlds are labours of love for their creators – Tekumel grew out of Prof Barker's studies as a linguist and an orientalist, whereas Glorantha emerged out of Greg Stafford's interest in mythology and spirituality. And, for what it's worth, I can't stand either of them.

The truth is, I don't much enjoy worlds with that level of carefully worked-out detail. Or maybe I just have bad luck with my gaming groups. I think I am sitting down to play a game of *Runequest.* The referee starts explaining some point about Praxian shamanistic magic, which (very properly) requires a degree of knowledge about the setting's rich mythology. Another player disagrees slightly with the referee about some

> **"Roleplayers like me prefer to leave the background – well, in the background."**

detail. A doubtless fascinating discussion breaks out between them. And I, who was hoping to go on an adventure, am left, gibbering restlessly in the corner muttering 'Get on with it!' Now, I have absolutely no problem with people who want to immerse themselves in a gameworld in this way, it seems a perfectly valid type of play, and no doubt makes for some extremely involved gaming. But unfortunately it just doesn't interest me at all.

There seem to be two sorts of roleplayers. Firstly, there's my sort, who want mainly to spend time creating interesting characters and then tell stories around them. Of course, we want there to be a good setting as well – the characters have to live somewhere, after all – and we certainly prefer it if that setting is consistent and believable. Nevertheless, we do tend to think of it just as scenery, the stage on which all the interesting things happen. Roleplayers like me prefer to leave the background – well, in the background.

The other sort of player finds the setting for the game interesting in its own right. These people are fascinated by Jorune, or the World of Progress or (if they are particularly sad) Synnibar, and they want to spend time exploring them. They think that the referee's job is to create a realistic simulation of these worlds. A friend of mine – who has been running campaigns in ICE's version of *Middle-earth* for over ten years now – once tried to explain this kind of approach to me. *"Middle-earth* is real," he commented, "the player-characters are just passing through".

My *Pendragon* campaigns take the opposite approach, playing fast and loose with the official background. I usually manage to remember that Arthur is king, the Saxons are the baddies and Scotland is somewhere in the north, but the other facts always seem to mutate to fit in with the story I am telling. I once had a player in my group who seemed to have committed the whole of Arthurian mythology to memory. He didn't like it if I forgot the location of Tooting castle or the name of Sir Euonymus' great uncle. I was spinning yarns around the Arthurian theme, but he wanted to interact with the details of the official setting. Consequently, he didn't much like my game and I doubt whether I would have liked one of his.

The authors of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Technical Manual* make the point that their floorplans of the Enterprise are not intended to be a strait-jacket on writers' imaginations. The Enterprise is not a real spaceship, they say, but it is a real vehicle: "one designed for storytelling".

Just so.

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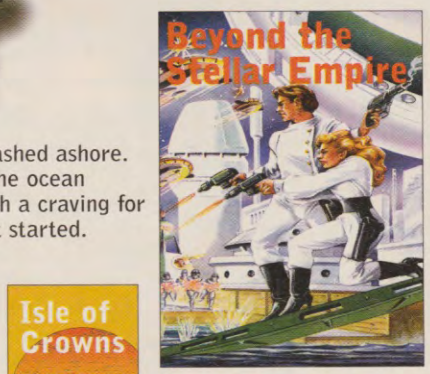

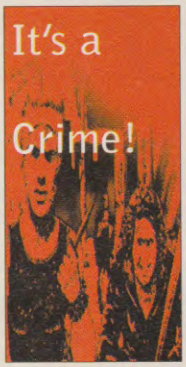

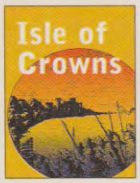

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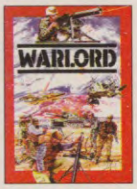

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COLUMN

On The Soapbox

Do storytelling roleplayers turn their noses up at the rest of us? Aren't they taking it too seriously? Louis J Prosperi rejects this storytelling superiority and insists he doesn't have an inferiority complex.

IT'S HARD TO SAY when it started. Some people will tell you that it didn't start with any one game, but that it grew out of countless campaigns run by roleplayers looking for more from their games than dungeons, monsters and hit points. Some people say it started with the first release of White Wolf Game Studio's *Vampire: The Masquerade* in 1990. Others think it started before then, with the release of Lion Rampart's *Ars Magica*. I think it began with the publication of *Vampire: The Masquerade 2nd Edition* in 1992. This trouble I'm talking about is the trend in roleplaying games towards storytelling, what I call the 'storytelling movement'.

Now, before you jump up and say 'What do you mean storytelling is trouble?' let me explain. First, I think in many ways the storytelling movement is a good thing. I applaud the efforts of game designers who have tried to emphasise the elements of story and fiction. After all, stories are what roleplaying games are all about – you've got characters, a setting and a plot, the three basic ingredients of any good story. If you're into more sophisticated games, you might be shooting for a certain mood, and the story you're playing might have a compelling theme. And I have no problem with that.

No, the problem I have is an ugly outgrowth of the efforts of these game designers, one which most of them probably don't consider to be positive. This is the tendency I've noticed among players of storytelling-style games to adopt an air of superiority over the people who enjoy the more game-related aspects of RPGs, such as rolling dice and bending rules. That's right, superiority. Some people actually believe that the style of game they play is innately superior to that of others. Does anyone else think these people need to take themselves just a little less seriously? And the part of this that really gets to me is that most of these people don't simply have a preference of how to play, nor do they merely suggest that others try it. No, that would be reasonable. My problem is that lots of these storytelling players and referees believe there is a 'best' way to play games. To me, that's like saying there is a best way to watch TV or a movie, or read a book, or enjoy anything in life. Am I the only one who thinks this attitude is just a tad arrogant?

"Some people actually believe that the style of game they play is innately superior to that of others."

What's wrong with people playing RPGs for the same reasons they play *Risk, Monopoly* or *Magic: The Gathering?* What's wrong with approaching a roleplaying game with the attitude that your character is little more than a playing piece? Who is to say one style is better than another? The idea of anyone claiming that their way of playing make believe is better than someone else's is absurd. It has the potential to harm the roleplaying hobby. For instance, this trend has affected the way some players evaluate games.

By way of example, I'd like to share a short anecdote which demonstrates some of the effects of this attitude. This occurred on the *Earthdawn* Internet mailing list sometime ago, when a discussion thread had begun regarding the difference between game mechanic drawbacks and those imposed by a game environment, or what was referred to as 'roleplaying drawbacks'. After one participant stated his view that roleplaying drawbacks don't work, another participant responded by citing the example of *Ars Magica,* a game in which roleplaying drawbacks are used effectively. The reply was, "But this is *Earthdawn,* a roleplaying game, not *Ars Magica,* a storytelling game."

Can anyone tell me the difference between a roleplaying game and a storytelling game? No? I didn't think so. How about we all just relax and admit there is no one best way to play RPGs, and enjoy the games we play, the way we play them, and allow others to do the same. After all, isn't the whole point of these games to have fun?

Louis J Prosperi is the line developer of the *Earthdawn* roleplaying system from FASA.

ON THE SOAPBOX is your page – it's where we give you the opportunity to get something off your chest (as long as it's to do with the gaming industry, of course). The views expressed by you on this page aren't necessarily the views of arcane, or of the arcane editorial team. If you'd like to have your say, send in a piece of around 700 words long to: On the Soapbox, arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Or e-mail it to: arcane@futurenet.co.uk.

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PLAY-BY-MAIL

Before-play

In the first installment of our new regular postal gaming column, Matthew Green takes a trip back in time and discovers that this is an element of our hobby that's certainly here to stay. Just like Tolkien's fiction...

THE EARLIEST KNOWN PLAY-BY-MAIL game occurred in 1119AD (and you thought *D&D* has been around for a long time!), when couriers between Henry I and Louis VI of France exchanged regular moves for a chess game along with their routine diplomatic messages. Okay, so that was a long time ago, but now after some 877 years, postal games are beginning to make an impact.

Those of you who have heard of play-by-mail (PBM) might regard the whole concept with a little scepticism. It is not uncommon for people to think of PBM gamers as some kind of distant cousin to the stereotypical trainspotter, but believe me, this perception is totally unfounded. PBM games have come a long way since those early days, over 800 years in development, and many are now extremely sophisticated designs. The *Middle-earth* play-by-mail system detailed below is a good example of the latest generation of quality PBM products.

Middle-earth play-by-mail: Third Age, circa 1650

This simulation represents a glimpse into Middle-earth (some 1,500 years prior to the events described in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings),* which is both accurate regarding the details described by Tolkien himself and consistent with the offerings to be found in Iron Crown Enterprise's *Middle-earth Roleplaying Series.* Allsorts PBM runs multiple games, each with room for 25 players. The game is essentially a titanic struggle of good versus evil, players taking any one of the ten Free Peoples, the ten Dark Servants or the five Neutrals at the start of the game.

The game ends when the One Ring is taken to Mount Doom and either cast into the Cracks of Doom or presented to the Dark Lord himself. It is essentially a team game; you should be prepared to exchange a fair number of letters (or even phone calls) with other players of the same alignment, and work with them to achieve your common goal. The best player of the winning team is considered the overall winner.

Like all true roleplaying games, though, winning doesn't necessarily have to be important. As your nation grows you will have the opportunity to encounter and interact with some of the many personalities of *Middle-earth,* possibly even recruiting them as leaders and heroes for your own armies. This is your chance to meet some of those characters you may have previously only read about – Saruman the White, Tom Bombadil, the Buck Hill hobbits, and of course Gandalf the Grey are just a few examples. There are many, many more, as well as settlements to explore or even conquer – Bree, Lothlorien and Goblin-gate to name but a few.

At £3.50 per turn Middle-earth *is a fairly expensive PBM, but also a quality one. Further free information on this game, and the* 2950 *scenario (set at about the same time as* The Hobbit *and* The Lord of the Rings) *can be obtained from:*

Allsorts PBM Games, PO Box 25, Bude, Cornwall EX23 9YU

PBM news

Two new releases to mention this month. First, *Absolute Power* from Silver Dreamer, which sets players amidst a crumbling empire of five planets devastated by war. Your goal is to rediscover lost technologies and gain influence over your homeworld, and ultimately the other four worlds as well. If you want more information on *Absolute Power,* contact Silver Dreamer at PO Box 556, Sidcup, Kent DA14 4FQ.

Secondly, a rather unusual game, *Tribal Kingdom Soccer* from Dunedin Games. Players compete in a league where fantasy races and magic are used to achieve victory in football-like matches, which often erupt into full-scale war. This will not appeal to everybody, but it certainly offers a different slant to the numerous football management games. Contact Dunedin at16 Craigleith Gardens, Edinburgh EH4 3JW.

The journals

A few of the editorial team have recently signed up for some PBM games themselves, and in future issues we will be taking a look at their mini-diaries to give you some tasters. Read about how Andy Butcher lives up to his name playing an empire of Berserkers in Timepattern's *Starweb.* Follow my exploits in KJC's popular *Beyond the Stellar Empire* and check out the darker side of Paul Pettengale. More next month...

Drop us a line

If you have any PBM-orientated questions or comments please drop us a line at arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. We are particularly interested to hear from any players who have recently won games, or those of you who have cunning tips to share with other arcane readers. You never know, if you're lucky you might just manage to win yourself one of those coveted arcane T-shirts.

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RETRO

Paranoia

Designed by Dan Gelber, Greg Costtikyan, Eric Goldburg and Ken Rolston

Published by West End Games First published in 1985 £16.95 Still available

If you've ever wanted to ham it up and forget all pretence of intellectual advancement, this game is for you. Paul Pettengale rediscovers *Paranoia*, and is now convinced that the Computer is his friend.

One of the best *Paranoia* scenarios ever to come out of the doors of West End Games was called *Orcbusters*. It had the characters transported to another dimension, straight into a dark dungeon with 10 foot-wide corridors, secret doors and gelatinous cubes (which were raspberry flavoured).

IT'S A HARD LIFE, to be quickly followed by an all-too-easy death. Troubleshooting in Alpha Complex is a messy line of work. You wake up, you attend your mission briefing. More often than not you don't live to the end of it, dying with the knowledge that you're dispensable, if only because the Computer has got another five versions of you waiting on ice.

Treason is everywhere – everyone in the Complex is a traitor, if only because everyone is a mutant and mutations are signs of treason. And boy does the Computer take a dislike to traitors – indeed, all traitors must die, as must all commies, all members of the various underground secret societies which pervade the corridors of this future, subterranean world, and anyone who oversteps his security clearance.

Welcome to the world of *Paranoia*, the darkly humorous game of a grim future where players are guaranteed to be constantly at each others' throats ("trust no-one"), and guaranteed never to complete an adventure (you can only die six times, after all).

Reading the rules is every bit as funny as playing the game when it comes to *Paranoia*. Check out this quote: *"PCs spend a lot of time agonising over which variety of treason they want to be executed for, or which of two hopeless courses of action to take."* And it's true.

When it first hit the streets, back in May 1985, *Paranoia* received mixed reviews. It was criticised for being too loose a system, of being too single-scenario (rather than campaign) based, and (if you can believe this) of being too much fun. Yes, that sounds mad, but at the time everyone was wrapped up in a realism trip. We were all hooked on character development – a game which, in its five rules for referees, categorically stated, "Kill the bastards" in reference to the player characters was seen as being too anarchic for its own good.

Which was, quite frankly, complete bollocks. Never in gaming history has there been a game which was such a scream to play. Because the scenarios were more often than not poor excuses to rip off old films, or crap novels, or cheesy TV shows (yes, there was a scenario once published in *White Dwarf* – issue 91 – which featured darleks in sombreros speaking with Mexican accents, and another entitled 'The All-New Computer Horror Real Action Show'), the players had a fair idea of how to ham it up and throw their souls into playing their characters. Each character knew that he couldn't trust the rest of his trouble-shooting party – the lowly mechanic next to him could be a spy for the Computer (the Computer being the mad, entirely paranoid, entity which ran the totalitarian regime known as Alpha Complex), and consequently they spent as much time killing each other as killing the bad guys.

"Paranoia was a perfect tonic... it was there to lighten the mood."

Despite the fact that a typical *Paranoia* session resembled a pitch invasion at a Leeds match, only on a somewhat smaller scale, the players achieved a greater level of roleplaying than in the *D&D* campaign I was running at the time. The reason? The madcap atmosphere, the plots which hardly stretched the brain, and the fact that most of the conversation went on between the players rather than between PCs and NPCs, meant that the players forgot they were playing a game, and got into the somewhat surreal spirit of things. Simplicity, it would seem, when twinned with chaos, makes for a good time in roleplaying games.

Of course, the mechanics were nothing special: a D20 system based on general stats and skills (some of which were strange – Bootlicking, for example, was used to ingratiate yourself with superiors), but this was intentional. *Paranoia* should be a fast game, with deadly combat and improbable skills resolution. Again, the rules lawyers hated it, but they didn't know how to have fun, it would seem.

Paranoia was a perfect tonic. In the days when we were deeply serious about our roleplaying, *Paranoia* was there to lighten the mood. It was an ideal filler, to be played as one-off sessions in between campaign scenarios for your 'proper' games. It was, if you will, the streaker at a Conservative party conference.

And, the great thing is you can still buy it. *Paranoia* is still in print (now in its fifth edition, no less), and it's still worth phoning your local games company and ordering yourself a copy. It's as fresh now as it was a decade ago.

TRAVELLER EXCLUSIVE!

TRAV RETU

FROM T

When Game Designers' Workshop closed early this year, it seemed to spell the end for Traveller, *the classic science fiction roleplaying game. But now, a mere six months later, the game has returned with a new edition from a new company...*

Gary Gygax's *Dungeons & Dragons* may have been the first roleplaying game, but the hobby as we know it would not exist today without a number of other influential games that helped establish roleplaying and formed the basis for the games industry. Among them, *Traveller* is certainly one of the most important. First released in 1977, it was the first ever science fiction roleplaying game and became an almost immediate success. It's clear, simple design and flexible rules made it ideally suited to a wide variety of game styles, and it's remained undyingly popular for nearly 20 years. Over this time the game has been revised and updated in three separate versions (see 'Games of future past', page 28), and has developed a background of startling depth and scope, detailing a future of vast interstellar empires with complex politics, strong cultures and intricate history.

So how did *Traveller* originally get started, and why did Game Designers' Workshop decide to produce a science fiction roleplaying game?

"*Dungeons & Dragons* and its concept of roleplaying took the Game Designers' Workshop staff by storm," explains Marc Miller, the game's creator. "Each of us added our own area of interest and

"There has to be one person who has the vision behind a roleplaying game."

Marc Miller, *Traveller's* creator

expertise, and we played a variety of campaigns with our personally crafted characters. But we were also interested in historical gaming and in science fiction gaming. We had already produced a line of SF games, including *Bloodtree Rebellion, Double Star, Belter* and *Imperium,* which tried to blend SF with the traditional historical wargame model. *D&D* showed us a new model which we felt could and should be applied to science fiction.

"Between June 1976 and June 1977, I spent most of my time working out the basic structure of *Traveller* – the original three-book set. As each part was being designed, anyone who was interested in that area gave me his two cents' worth. For example, John Harshman was a strong proponent of defining animals by their ecological niche rather than by their appearance – calling an animal a Pouncer rather than a Felinoid. We all enjoyed working out what the game would do, although we thought of *Traveller* as more of a

TRAVELLER EXCLUSIVE!

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foundational set of rules – it was only later that the game established its extensive background."

When the rules were finished, Marc felt that they had a good game on their hands, but even he didn't expect it to be quite as much of a success as it turned out to be.

"In those days, selling 5,000 copies in a year was a mark of success for a game," he says. "We looked forward to selling at that level, and we fully expected to achieve it. I remember checking sales figures in mid-1977, and seeing we had sold just over 10,000 rules sets in 12 months. Now that surprised me."

From that promising start, *Traveller* continued to grow. In the roleplaying game industry, 100,000 copies is an informal benchmark – if your game sells that many, it's the equivalent of a gold album. In the time since its release, the various editions of the

"This is the most art-intensive roleplaying product I have worked on." Lester Smith, lead system developer

Traveller basic rules have topped 350,000 copies in total, with the first two supplements, *Book 4: Mercenary* and *Book 5: High Guard*, both selling over 100,000 each.

In 1991, though, Marc left GDW after nearly 20 years. "I was burned out," he says. "I had been designing games since 1972 and, by the time I left in 1991, I genuinely needed a change. I think that the break I took between 1991 and 1995 gave me back a lot of the energy I needed."

As it turned out, it was just as well that Marc had managed to regain his energy and enthusiasm. In February of this year, GDW's troubled finances finally forced the company to close, and the fate of *Traveller* hung in the balance.

When GDW closed, though, the rights to *Traveller* reverted to Marc. Within a month he had announced his intention to produce a new version of the game, and now, after a mere six months, *Traveller* is all set to return. It's involved a lot of work, but according to Marc, there was never any question of the game not continuing. "When GDW closed its doors in February," he explains, "the current edition of *Traveller – Traveller: The New Era* – automatically went out of print. I thought it was important to have an edition in print as soon as possible."

Rather than simply re-print the existing version of the game, though, Marc had something more ambitious in mind. "As I searched for a new publisher, I also started to lay out what I thought would be the ideal edition of the game. As it diverged from the current edition, it became clear to me that we could and should revert to a system closer to the original concept of the game."

It's obvious that right from the start Marc was pleased to be back in control of *Traveller*. Just as some people believe that the reason good books rarely make good movies is that the original strengths get diluted during the process, he feels very strongly that roleplaying games need a solid sense of direction to succeed. "There has to be one person who has the vision behind a roleplaying game," he explains. "Gary Gygax knew where *D&D* was going. Lovecraft fully documented his vision for *Call of Cthulhu*, and Chaosium has been faithful to it. When a roleplaying game shifts away from the designer who had the original vision for it, I

RE-INVENTING THE FUTURE

Both Marc Miller and Lester Smith are quick to point out that the new edition of *Traveller* has been a team effort. In order to produce it, Imperium Games brought together one of the most impressive groups of designers ever seen in roleplaying, each concentrating on different areas of the rules:

Ken Whitman: President and founder of Imperium Games, Ken was responsible for bringing the team together and running the business side of things. As if that wasn't enough, he also wrote the revised psionics system, and has been in charge of the graphic design, layout and production of the new book. He's been an avid gamer since 1980, run his own company before, and worked for TSR as its convention coordinator.

Timothy Brown: Responsible for the development of the alien cultures for *Traveller,* Timothy worked for GDW through the 1980s, contributing to *Traveller, Twilight: 2000* and *Space: 1889,* and acting as principle designer for *2300AD.* Moving to TSR, he then oversaw the development of the *Ravenloft, Dark Sun* and *Spelljammer* campaign worlds for TSR's *AD&D* system.

Greg Porter: Unsurprisingly, considering that he designed the acclaimed *3G3* gun design system, Greg is in charge of the technology and weapons systems in the new *Traveller.* He's also the man behind the *Timelords, CORPS* and *Macho Women with Guns* RPGs from BTRC games, which he runs.

Don Perrin: The man behind the starship design and construction rules for *Traveller,* Don was the co-designer of the *Wing Commander Collectable Trading Card Game,* designer and producer of the *Star of the Guardians* CCG, and was also involved in the superb *Supremacy* board game.

Larry Elmore: One of the best-known artists in roleplaying, Larry has worked for many game and book publishers, with perhaps his most famous work being for TSR's *Dragonlance* supplements and novels. He's responsible for the black and white interior art of the new book.

Chris Foss: A highly-respected science fiction artist, Chris first became famous in the 1970s for his paintings of huge spaceships. Since then he has worked on several major movies, including *Superman, Flash Gordon* and *Alien,* and his work can be seen on the covers of numerous science fiction novels. He has produced the cover and interior colour artwork for the new edition of *Traveller.*

Jean Rabe: The former coordinator of TSR's RPGA network, editor of *Polyhedron,* the RPGA's newsletter, and *Dragonlance* novelist, Jean is the editor of the *Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society* (JTAS), originally published by GDW. Imperium Games will be continuing the magazine, beginning with issue 25.

Tony Lee: Assistant system developer and editor for the *Traveller* line, Tony previously worked for many games magazines as a reviewer, and wrote for Steve Jackson Games' *Toon* roleplaying system.

Ashe Marler: Sharing the graphic design and layout work with Ken Whitman is Ashe's first major break in the roleplaying industry, but he's been a gamer and artist for many years.

Matt Machtan: In charge of Imperium Games' World Wide Web site, Matt is an avid gamer who started his own roleplaying club and organised the Point Con I convention.

What other roleplaying games – besides *Traveller* – does Marc enjoy? "I think *Call of Cthulhu* is extremely interesting and I enjoy playing it. *Space: 1889* was fun as well."

think it suffers. And I think that *Traveller: The New Era* suffered because a new vision was imposed on it. So I am pleased to be able to try to re-establish my vision for *Traveller* in this new edition."

But what exactly does Marc mean by his 'vision' for *Traveller,* and how has he applied that to the new edition of the game?

"I see four major points that I continually emphasize – first, the game system should support multiple levels of complexity depending on the needs and interests of individual players and referees. Second, *Traveller* needs to promote the fun of playing in addition to reading the background for enjoyment. Third, I want *Traveller* to support each of its historical eras (I call them milieus) for roleplaying – players can and should be able to roleplay in any of these periods and we should provide more than enough information to make that possible. Fourth, we should explicitly state a content standard which defines *Traveller* as 'good, clean fun'.

"Using that as a basis, I went on to write an essay on the foundations of *Traveller* which defines the technological and social basis of the game, so that we were all working on the same principles. The essay, which appears in the front of the new book, defines what grav plates are, what a jump drive is and so on, so that any player or referee can understand the principles that the game is based on."

So Marc knew exactly what he wanted to do with the game. Now it was time to find a suitable company to publish it, which is where

newcomer Imperium Games comes in. Marc certainly wasn't short of willing takers for *Traveller*, so why did he choose Imperium Games instead of a larger, well-established company?

"As I looked for a new publisher for *Traveller*, I spoke with several possible companies. Most wanted to add *Traveller* to their line; Ken Whitman, who founded Imperium, wanted to concentrated on producing *Traveller* alone, with no other games, at least to start off with. In addition, he put together a team of designers and writers who wanted to participate. Each of these people has a reputation of his or her own, and together I thought they brought a level of experience and expertise that would genuinely help to enhance *Traveller*. That team includes Lester Smith (who did *Dark Conspiracy* and *Dragon Dice)*, Tim Brown (who did parts of *2300 AD)*, Greg Porter (who wrote *Guns, Guns, Guns)*, Don Perrin (who designed *Star of the Guardians* and the new *Star Trek* card game), Larry Elmore (who does the interior art) and Jean Rabe (who used to run the RPGA). It was hard to think of a better team to make the next *Traveller.*" (For more information on the team behind the new version of *Traveller*, take a look at 'Re-inventing the future' on the left.)

Once he'd decided on Imperium Games, the hard work of turning Marc's ideas and vision into a brand new edition of *Traveller* really took hold.

"The new edition is designed for the neophyte, as well as the traditional fan."

Lester Smith, lead system developer

The key to producing a good sequel to almost anything is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the original, and start from there. What does Marc think were the keys to *Traveller's* previous success, and what does he think let it down?

"Traveller has always been a great resource to the referee," he explains. "The books made it possible to define the background in fine detail. The game supports starship design, world generation, character definition, animal encounters and dozens of other elements – it provides both a strong background and flexibility at the same time.

"Traveller's weakness has always been that it was not played enough," he continues. "Our challenge is to provide materials and support that will encourage playing this game system."

This is where Lester Smith, the highly respected game designer who became the lead system developer for the new version of *Traveller*, comes into the picture. From his work with the now-defunct GDW, Lester already had extensive experience with the various editions of the game, and knew what he thought of them.

"The original *Traveller* established a distinctive universe," says Lester, "with its own intriguing history, but now, 20 years later, its game mechanics show their age. *MegaTraveller* did a good job of following up on the original game and consolidating many of its supplements into a core set of rules, but in my opinion, it was designed more for the person already playing *Traveller* than for the neophyte. As for *Traveller: The New Era*, the purpose was to bring *Traveller* into the fold of the GDW house game system, the mechanics developed out of *Twilight: 2000 2nd edition* and *Dark Conspiracy*. With the demise of GDW, of course, there is no longer any driving need to adhere to that set of mechanics."

Of course, producing a new version of a game as successful as *Traveller* was no easy task. For a start, the team had to balance carefully the desires and expectations of existing *Traveller* fans with the need to make the game appeal to new gamers. Lester feels that the game's very success was probably the toughest problem that the team faced.

"In its long history, *Traveller* has spawned a lot of background material," he explains. "Long-standing fans have come to expect new developments on that background. That depth of game universe can be wonderful for new players as well, as long as they aren't absolutely buried in background details. Trying to maintain the right balance of enough background to keep old players intrigued, while gently initiating new players, is a tricky business for any game with this much of a history. I think that was one of the main reasons that Marc decided to set the initial release at the dawning of the Third Imperium. It is a period that is familiar in concept to old fans, but also fresh to new fans and old alike. Being an age of expansion, the dawn of the Third Imperium makes a great setting for exploration. But at the same time, old fans feel

GDW was far from the only company to produce supplements for *Classic Traveller* – Judges Guild, Digest Group and Seeker all released officially licensed material for the game. Successful games company FASA started off in this way.

Marc Miller's favourite books include Tom Clancy's techno-thrillers and Christopher Rowley's *Star Hammer* and *Battle Master* novels. He also claims to have, "grown up reading Robert Heinlein," and says he would be, "remiss if I didn't include the Bible". His favourite movies are *The President's Analyst*, the samurai epic *Ran* and *Star Wars*.

a sense of familiarity with it, because they know what that Imperium will grow to be a millennium later."

The game's age also posed its own difficulties. *Traveller* has always been about both roleplaying and science fiction, and in 20 years, both of these fields have changed somewhat. Lester was less concerned about the setting of the game, though, than about the mechanics themselves.

"If one believes Gibson's and Sterling's contention that cyberpunk is not a new thing, but rather a return to the origins of science fiction, which I do," he explains, "then the only two things that have really changed about the genre in the past two decades are that it has gained acceptance in the culture at large, rather than having merely a cult following, and it has grown beyond books, on to the screen, making it more visual than ever before."

This, Lester feels, wasn't too hard to deal with. In fact, he thinks that it may well be one of the biggest things that the new version of the game has going for it. "In terms of the larger interest in science fiction, the new edition of *Traveller* seeks to reach new players. It is designed for the neophyte, as well as the traditional fan. In terms of the more visual nature of science fiction, the new edition is simply filled with exciting artwork by Chris Foss and Larry Elmore, and the graphic approach has been designed to show off that work. This is the most art-intensive roleplaying game product I have ever had the pleasure of working on."

As well as traditional supplements and sourcebooks, Marc and Imperium Games intend to support the new *Traveller* with a range of novels and computer software, including games and utilities – such as a starship design system.

The changes in roleplaying games were more of a concern from Lester's point of view. "There have been two real changes over the years," Lester thinks. "Players now expect more control over the creation of their characters, and game mechanics that are elegant enough to virtually disappear during play. When the first roleplaying games appeared, they were as much wargame as roleplaying, but that simply isn't the case anymore. People want to concentrate on the story now, and they want mechanics that enhance that rather than distracting from it."

One of the aims of the new rulebook is to provide a solid base for expanding the system – the "multiple levels of complexity" that Marc mentions. So, for example, although the book provides simple world design rules, expect a more detailed and complex system to appear in a supplement.

Dealing with this change in people's expectations and desires formed a major part of his work on the game, but Lester is confident that the result is a success. "I think people will be pleasantly surprised to see how the old character generation systems have been shaped to guide players through the creation of a character without forcing that character into a particular mould," he says. "There is a lot of choice here as to how much control you want versus how much you want to leave to the game. And I believe that the core mechanics of skill use, task attempts, and combat – things central to any roleplaying game – are flexible and natural, making for a pleasant smoothness of play. Of course, as I have already said, I also think that the choice of setting for the new edition, at the dawn of the Third Imperium, makes for a great adventure as well."

The only other problem that Lester and the rest of the team faced was the sheer volume of material they had to deal with. Deciding what to put into the basic rules and what to leave out was a tough process, but one with which Lester is familiar. "I frequently find that when I travel," he says, "I have far too many things to pack into my bags and no amount of time is sufficient to make everything fit. In my experience, publishing is the same sort of situation. You almost always have ten tons of topics you want to cover, but no-one this century has time to read *War and Peace*, and even if they did, no-one has time to write it."

On the other hand, not every part of the development process was a problem. There are several elements of the game system that Lester was particularly pleased with, most notably the new task resolution system.

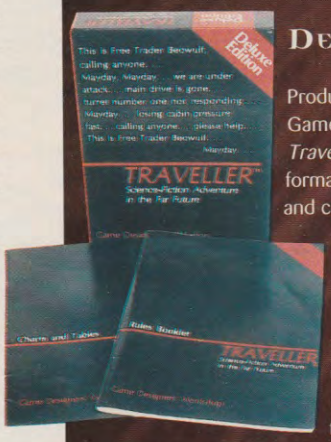
Games of Future Past

Over the course of its 20-year history, *Traveller* has undergone several changes in the form of new and revised editions of the rules, and shifts in the background to the game. In all there have been releases in four separate editions, three of which represented major rules revisions...

Classic Traveller

First published in 1977, the original *Traveller* rules came as a boxed set of three 5.5" by 8.5" books, with distinctive black and red covers which many people still associate with *Traveller*. *Book 1* detailed character creation and combat, *Book 2* dealt with every aspect of starships, including construction, combat and travel, while *Book 3* covered worlds, their characteristics and the various adventures they offered. The rules were innovative, using only six-sided dice, and introducing the concept of skills for characters.

The game was originally envisioned as a generic science fiction roleplaying system which could be used by referees to create their own backgrounds and campaigns, and for over a year the boxed set was all that was available. The game's success, combined with requests from players and referees, led to the release of five more rulebooks and over 60 additional volumes detailing the background and history of the Third Imperium, which became the standard setting for the game.



Deluxe Traveller

Produced under license from GDW by Games Workshop in 1983, *Deluxe Traveller* dropped the 'small book' format in favour of a more traditional size, and combined the three basic books into a single rulebook and a separate book of charts and tables.

Although the rules were largely unchanged, *Deluxe Traveller* was of great significance to British roleplayers, introducing many UK gamers to the *Traveller* system for the first time. Games Workshop's impressive distribution and continuing coverage of *Traveller* in its magazine, *White Dwarf*, helped to ensure that *Traveller* became as popular in the UK as it already was in America, a situation that has continued to this day.

MegaTraveller

The first major revision to the *Traveller* rules, *MegaTraveller* was published in 1987, and consolidated the bulk of the material produced over the previous ten years into an updated version of the game system. As well as incorporating the Mercenary, High Guard, Scouts and Merchant Prince books into the basic set of rules, *MegaTraveller* eliminated many inconsistencies and incompatible rulings that had developed throughout the game's long history, and also introduced a standardised, flexible task system which now formed the foundation of the game's new rules.

MegaTraveller also heralded a major change in the background of the game, introducing the vast upheaval caused by the assassination of the Emperor and the collapse of the Imperium into warring states. The initial result was another three-book boxed set which described a much more detailed and complicated game system, and which was supported by a number of additional supplements and rulebooks.

Traveller: The New Era

Representing the biggest change to *Traveller* since its original release, *The New Era* was published by GDW in 1992 and converted the game to the company's 'house' system, a development of the *Twilight: 2000* rules. In addition, the game background was moved forward in time once again, depicting the era following the fall of the Imperium, where small groups of worlds were struggling to build a brand new empire and fight back the dangerous attacks of an extremely deadly computer virus which had been released towards the end of the civil war.

Produced as a single, 380-page softcover book, *Traveller: The New Era* once again stepped up the complexity and depth of the rules, and was supported by a range of supplements and sourcebooks. Although it won the Origins Award for best roleplaying game and developed a dedicated following, the switch in rule systems was poorly received by many existing *Traveller* fans who preferred the old system.

"One of my primary goals in developing the new edition of *Traveller* was to marry the character attributes to the skills, without changing the number ranges on attributes or skills, and without changing the 2D6 nature of the game. But there were other improvements, too. I also wanted to solve the problem of low-skill characters having absolutely no chance whatsoever of succeeding at a high difficulty task, as was the case in *MegaTraveller*. In addition, I wanted the old characters to be completely compatible with the new game. Oh, and finally, I wanted to establish world peace in my lifetime." Lester, as you can no doubt see, is not a man who sets himself small goals.

"I'm still working on that last one, though," he says with a wry chuckle, "but you'll be glad to hear that the rest have all been accomplished. By using a character's attribute rating as a target number and trying to roll low rather than high, the attributes became essential to skill use. Then we cheated a bit on the 2D6 basis, establishing that as the average difficulty level, and adding more dice for increased difficulty. I think the resultant package works very nicely."

However, some of the consequences of these changes to *Traveller's* structure only became clear later in the game's development. "The ramifications this began to have for combat meant that, fortunately, the whole system turned out even better than I had expected. Attributes turned out to be important in terms of raw ability, but skills became of extreme importance in terms of multiple actions, and the new dice setup works wonderfully with the traditional *Traveller* range mechanics. Greg Porter deserves much of the credit for all of this."

Another expansion to *Traveller* that Imperium is considering would take the form of a collectable card game. The team has various ideas for this, including a system that could be played as a stand-alone game or integrated into the starship combat system.

Now that the new edition of *Traveller* is completed, Lester feels suitably confident that the team has achieved exactly what it set out to do.

"I think that this version of *Traveller* is going into the hands of many new players," he explains. "The game has always been a staple of a particular core of fans, people familiar with its history at Game Designers' Workshop. But with this new release, I believe the game will appeal to many new people. That, I think, is the vision and purpose of Imperium Games. What the new version of *Traveller* sets out to do is return to the style and vision of the original game, but updating the presentation and mechanics to meet the needs and expectations of modern roleplayers. I think it accomplishes these goals extremely well. I can't wait to see people playing it."

Marc agrees wholeheartedly with these sentiments. "As soon as this project was announced on the Internet," he says, "I received a variety of suggestions from hundreds of long-time players. There was no way I could use all of the suggestions sent to me because some were mutually contradictory. Instead, I decided that I needed to proceed by implementing what I wanted, and trust that this vision would ultimately satisfy most people who are interested in the game, just as my vision has satisfied most people up until now. And I think we're going to succeed."

As Marc and Lester explain, the new *Traveller* rules use the same attributes and skills as *Classic* and *MegaTraveller*, meaning that previous characters and adventures are easily converted to the new system with little work – so you won't have to throw away your old books.

Now you've read about the development of the new edition of *Traveller*, and heard what Marc Miller and Lester Smith think of it, you really need a critical opinion to complete the picture. So, just how good is the new edition, and did they really get it right? For a full review, turn to page 62 to see what **arcane** thinks...

I WAS A TOURNAM

Stepping into the competitive a daunting venture, but S

Some were alone, striding purposefully from booth to booth in the bustling market area. Others huddled in conspiratorial groups and talked in low tones. Wherever you looked there were wizards. And they were all getting nervous. Soon would come the hour when the arenas opened and they would stand, face-to-face, and hurl powerful, body-shattering, mind-bending, soul-sucking spells at each other to decide who was the mightiest magician in this ancient kingdom. It was the time of reckoning.

Where was this contest happening? Was it the infamous Multiverse Open Wizardry Competition held every 1,000 years in the dry and dusty caves beneath the flying trans-dimensional citadel of Stormburg? Was it the fearsome Druidick Confluence of the decadent Raegiraen Empire on the far-flung planet of Sollipsic 6? No. This was the *Magic: The Gathering* National Championship at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, and I'd been sent along by **arcane** to find out what it was like to be a *Magic* Tournament Virgin.

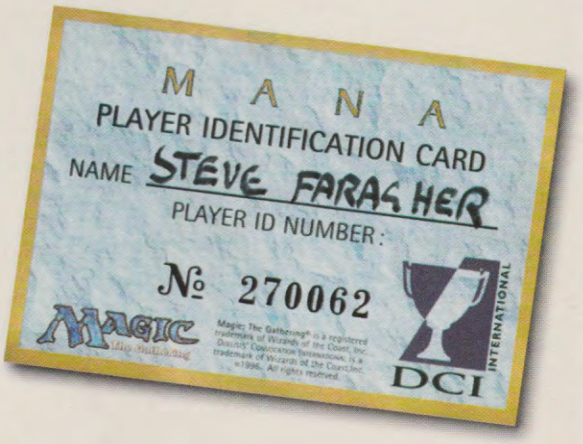
MAGIC PROFESSIONALS

I'm going to assume that all of you know what *Magic: The Gathering* is. I'm also going to assume that there's little point in telling you how fantastically, unbelievably popular it now is across the world. It's been translated into more languages than a top UN translator can speak and it's being sold in more countries than Michael Palin's visited at the licence-payer's expense. *Magic* can justifiably claim to be the fastest-growing game in the world. But what you may not be aware of is just how seriously *Magic* is being played. In the USA, *Magic* tournaments are offering rapidly escalating prize money to the winners, with the inevitable consequence that there are now professional *Magic: The Gathering* players. Just stop and imagine that for a moment – people who do nothing but play *Magic* in order to earn a decent living. I can't decide whether they're incredibly lucky or just so off their rockers that they should be pitied.

Anyway, the top prize of the UK Nationals was a trip to the World Championships to face up to some of these American professionals (and hopefully thrash them) along with the kudos of being able to tell your mates down the pub that you're the greatest magician on these islands – *officially* was enough to get thousands of people applying for the 256 places available in this year's competition.

And I was one of the lucky ones. Of the 256 places at the finals, 50 were reserved for well-known *Magic* players and representatives of the gaming media (that's me), and the others were only available to those with a re-dial facility on their telephones, because in order to get in you had to phone up the Wizards of the Coast hotline on a prearranged date. Naturally,

"Until you play a game of *Magic* in a truly competitive environment you can't imagine how enjoyable it can be."



Not everybody's got one of these, but you too could have one if you enter for next year's Nationals.

1,200 people made the arena feel pretty full, but it was also strangely quiet...

MAGIC NT VIRGIN

a of tournament roleplaying is a Faragher is undeterred...

with so many people wanting so few spaces it was absolute mayhem – the people I talked to who managed to get a place in the final all told the same story of starting to ring at 9am when the hotline was opened and of getting an engaged tone all day until finally managing to book a place sometime in the afternoon. It takes quite a bit of dedication to get yourself to the *Magic* finals. Some people thought it was rather unfair that the finals had been organised in this way, and many people were hoping that next year there would be a series of regional qualifiers to decide who would go on to the prestigious national finals.

STRATEGIC PREPARATIONS

So once you've got your place booked it's time to get yourself into serious training. The first thing I did was take a whole evening to look through all my cards to see what I had that could make a strong deck. I had arranged to have a few coaching sessions from some of the top players who work for Wizards of the Coast, but in the end I decided that a) that was probably a bit unfair and b) I wanted to try to have a deck that hadn't been seen before. I'd read about all sorts of championship decks and it seemed to me that I wouldn't be able to compete with the number of cards that these players had (I've got a modest collection and I only normally play for fun), so I'd have to come up with something a bit original if I was going to do well. In the end I plumped for a blue and black deck combining black damage and creature spells with blue denial spells. However, by the time I decided on that it was quite late, so I quickly put a deck together and went to bed.

"Soon would come the hour when they would stand, face-to-face, and hurl mind-bending, soul-sucking spells at each other."

Over the next few weeks I played everybody I could. Future Publishing (which produces **arcane**) employs lots of young people who are into gaming of all kinds, so there was no shortage of opponents for me to try my skills out on. The first few times I played I did pretty well, but unfortunately lost as many games as I won. I redesigned my deck within the blue and black theme, I traded for cards that I needed to round it out and I kept playing games. After about a week of intensive playing I noticed that my cards were already starting to look a bit tatty. That's when I swallowed my pride and for the first time ever used a card condom – one of those plastic sleeves that keeps your card safe from damage. I didn't want to be disqualified from the final because my cards were too marked.

Now, shall I stick or twist? Oh go on... I'll twist.

Rob Pegg is a well-known face at *Magic* tournies.

Kenny had never been to a big tournie either.

Colin knew all the odds and all the players.

THE RIGHT BALANCE

As time went on and the final started getting nearer, I finally seemed to stumble upon the deck I needed. I still had the basic blue/black theme that I'd started off with, but finally the balance of cards seemed right. I started regularly beating all my opponents, and my greatest moment of triumph came when I beat Paul (**arcane**'s Editor) easily when he was playing the winning tournament deck from the first Pro Tour championship. I started to get very excited about going to the finals and imagined that I could do pretty well, maybe better than everybody expected. I still didn't think I'd go all the way to the finals though, and I certainly wasn't booking any holiday time off for my trip to the States, but nevertheless I was feeling pretty confident.

So before I knew it the weekend of the final had arrived. The folks at **arcane** had a stall at the championships, so I hitched a ride up with them the night before and stayed in their hotel. I spent a rather strange evening in one of Birmingham's posher hotels, much too nervous to sleep and far too tired to be of any use.

The next morning I was up bright and early going through my deck, just making sure that everything was in place. Before long I was making my way to the arena. Birmingham NEC, in case you've never been there, is a strange place rather like an overgrown motorway service station. It's all roundabouts and modern buildings, asphalt and brick. Luckily there were signs up to point me in the right direction. I found myself wondering what the general population thought was going on. Did they imagine some sort of dramatic showdown between Paul Daniels and David Copperfield? Probably.

And then everything seemed to happen very fast. From entering the enormous building packed with excited *Magic* players swinging their free goody bags, to queuing up for registration, to sitting at the table with my three opponents. Yes, three. In the first round of the tournament you sat at a table with three other people and played a match (three games) with each of them. Then all the results were collected and the best players went through to the next round. My opponents seemed very friendly and we took a moment to introduce

ourselves. Something that had already struck me was the wide variety of people who were there, and this was confirmed by finding out what a varied bunch my table was.

First there was Kenny Wong, a 24 year-old student from Plymouth. This was also Kenny's first tournament and he seemed pretty nervous. He kept saying things like, "Oh no, I'm not even going to win a game." The other two seemed much more relaxed than either Kenny or I. It turned out that they were both veterans of *Magic* tournaments. One was Rob Pegg from Anglesea. 27 years old, Rob "worked for the government". "I'm not allowed to say any more if it's going to be printed," he explained enigmatically. The last person on the table was Colin Tipton, a 37 year-old bookie from Droitwich. That's right. Bookie. I didn't ask if he was taking any money on who'd be in the final.

"I should have been devastated, of course. All that hard work gone up in smoke... but I was elated... I'd had so much fun."

Odds-on favourite?

And so it was on to the first game. I was playing Kenny. After just a few moves I gained a quick stranglehold on him and it was all over. I'd won my first game easily. My confidence soared and I started to look forward to getting through to the next round, imagining the looks of admiration and surprise on the faces of my friends when they found out I'd done so well. Me, a rank outsider – I very nearly leaned over to Colin and asked if he would give me odds on being in the final.

That was it, of course. That was the only game I won. Kenny came back in truly competitive spirit and won the next two games, and then I had to sit down and be quietly and professionally humiliated by Rob and Colin. Colin had already been beaten by Rob, and Rob was then beaten by Kenny, so the only person on our table who went through to the next round of the tournament was Kenny, proving at least that virgins can get on well at these tournaments.

I should have been completely devastated, of course. All that hard work gone up in smoke within the first two hours of the tournament, but instead I was elated. Why? Because I'd had so much fun, that's why. Until you play a game of *Magic* in a truly competitive environment like this you can't imagine how enjoyable it can be. I was on an adrenaline high. And I had also just made some really good new friends. Colin and I immediately retired to the bar feeling in need of some liquid refreshment, and chatted over what had gone wrong in our games – pretty soon we were swapping strategies and tips like nobody's business.

So if you fancy having a go at a tournament, don't be shy about it. You probably won't do particularly well the first time, but one thing's for sure, you'll have a great deal of fun. You'll no doubt meet some friendly people and you'll improve your *Magic* game considerably, even if you don't win. And that, I'm pleased to say, is what it's all about – meeting like-minded people, having lots of fun and playing games. It sounds good, doesn't it?

(Top)
The heat is on and Kenny takes Rob out (I don't think I was helping Rob.)
(Above)
That's enough fooling about, now to thrash Colin. Ahem.
(Below)
Kenny is victorious. Swine.
(Bottom)
Still, at least I learned some new card tricks, eh?

I wanna go

If you fancy playing in some tournaments yourself there are many ways to go about it. One is to just check the classified ads in arcane, there are always people advertising tournaments in there. Make yourself a deck and go along. Or go down to your local gaming shop and have a look at the noticeboard, there's bound to be a contact up there, and if there isn't you can always set one up yourself.

But if you're really serious about tournament playing you should join the Duelists's Convocation. This official Wizards of the Coast organisation is the only recognised controller of the game. Basic membership for a year is free – you get it whenever you play in a DC-sanctioned tournament. If you want a bit more than that you can pay £13.50 and get Legends membership. This entitles you to a discount on subscribing to *Duelist* magazine and a whole bunch of goodies including two special *Magic* cards with unique art and a *Magic* poker deck, as well as much more besides. Details can be had by phoning Wizards of the Coast on 0345 125599 or by writing to the folks there at: PO Box 1562, Glasgow, G2 8BW, or you can e-mail them at: uk@wizards.com.

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New Fantasy Settings part I:

The Dawn of Time

In the first part of our new series, Phil Masters looks to the past for some new settings for your fantasy campaigns...

Some *GURPS* supplements to look out for: *Fantasy II* (for a fantastical/tribal society), *Ice Age* (on the early Stone Age), *Celtic Myth* (powerful tribal heroes), *Timeline* (an overview of history), *Places of Mystery* (relevant locations), *Aztecs* (obviously) and *Voodoo* (for an excellent spirit-based magic system).

The most important element in heroic fantasy is magic – without some kind of supernatural or unearthly element, however subtle, something isn't usually called 'fantasy'. The heroic part means that characters tend to be larger than life – mighty warriors and wizards of power. But most heroic-fantasy games and stories add other features such as knights in armour, crenellated castles and feudal politics. In fact, if you asked them for a definition of fantasy, many people would mention this stuff first. And, indeed, when gamers think of fantasy RPG and gaming systems, it's this sort of setting we assume to constitute what fantasy should be.

But where did the knights in armour creep in to what we all think of as 'fantasy'? It started with those Arthurian tales which became so popular that they established themselves as the standard heroic myths of Europe. Later, writers such as William Morris became obsessed with the medieval period, depicting it as an age of wonders, and then came J R R Tolkien, an expert on medieval literature. Fantasy RPGs followed the trend – even when they included Arabian Nights Djinn or quasi-Mongol hordes, they still tended to draw from the same period of time.

There are plenty of Stone Age movies around, of varying quality. Anything with dinosaurs in (eg. *One Million Years B.C.*) is pure fantasy, but then *Big Lizards and Fur Bikinis* could be a campaign theme in itself. Others, such as *The Clan of the Cave Bear* and *Quest for Fire*, aim for more realism.

Medieval-style fantasy is okay, but it has become a cliché. It's not easy to get right, because the complex laws of feudalism are alien to modern gamers. That's not to say fantasy games can't borrow from history, but there's a lot of history to choose from, and this series of four articles will look at some other options.

Just to be clear, it's only fair to explain what these articles are not about. They are not concerned with roleplaying in precise, accurately-depicted historical settings – that can be a lot of fun, but it demands a degree of detailed research and specialised knowledge which can get in the way of real, rip-roaring, heroic, fantasy adventures. And they are not about bolting arbitrary non-medieval bits (pyramids, big guns, cavemen) on to the side of your pseudo-medieval world – that can be amusing, but it often makes the gameworld like a patchwork, with too many inconsistencies. They are about raiding different historical settings for outlines and decor for your fantasy campaigns.

The Stone Age

The simplest style for a fantasy game must come from the earliest, simplest age, right?

Well, not exactly. Stone Age roleplaying can be interesting, but limited resources limit characters. All else aside, the sheer struggle for survival is likely to consume so much of any PC's time and energy that the idea of adventuring is likely to be pretty alien. In fact, it could look like a betrayal of the tribe – "What you mean, you want to go look for magic rock, you should be out catching rabbits to feed us!" On the other hand, this style has a lot of potential for unique experiences and true heroism.

Stone Age games can be played for laughs – all monosyllabic dialogue and big clubs – but that's unlikely to make for a long-running campaign. A more serious approach could appeal to the sort of thoughtful player who likes getting into non-contemporary mind-sets. Characters in such a world would see it as filled with powerful spirits and barely-understood forces; heroism would lie in protecting the tribe from mundane and supernatural danger, learning more about both the physical world and the nature of the spirits, and perhaps laying the foundations for future civilisations. Not as grand as

Rules to use

There are few RPG rule systems written specifically for ancient-style settings, so anyone inspired by this article will need to choose one which is either designed to be flexible, or one that they know well enough to modify (or create their own). Campaigns can either be grittily realistic, concerned with the problems of survival, or grandly heroic, with the PCs as heroes from primeval legend. The two styles may demand different sorts of rules, although some systems claim to be flexible enough to cover both.

AD&D **is popular and well-known, and includes data on all sorts of weapons and armour. High-level characters are undeniably heroic and even superhuman. On the other hand, it is a game that encourages the use of armour, and the standard rules on magic and religion aren't really appropriate – it would require a lot of tinkering.** ***GURPS*** **is a very generic system, with lots of appropriate sourcebooks. Most people regard it as best for realistic games, especially because combat without armour can be dangerous. If you want something even more flexible but more oriented to super-powerful beings (if a little complex to learn), look at the** ***Hero*** **system; Gilgamesh might be played as a Bronze Age super-hero.**

Other systems have their own advantages – ***Everway,*** **for example, has a very shamanistic feel, and is good for handling powerful heroes who wander the worlds of men and spirits.**

conventional fantasy objectives, but very important to the characters.

So this style of setting could provide uniquely challenging opportunities to jaded gamers looking for something different. On the other hand, it's so different that referees should be careful of starting such a campaign unless they are sure their players can handle it.

Incidentally, definitions can stretch a little – the Stone Age merges into the Bronze, and the basic pattern of tribal societies and shamanistic magic survived much longer. A few remote tribes are still technically in the Stone Age in 1996. And if you want more wide-ranging adventure in this sort of setting, and less trudging, you could always set up a culture which has just domesticated the horse. Look at the Plains Indians after the Europeans first reached the New World – even before they met the newcomers they acquired stray horses, and developed the skills which made them some of the finest light cavalry in history.

Technology: Real Stone Age technology is, of course, rather restricted – although no-one should underestimate the ingenuity of any people who can survive using little but flint and wood. Weaponry is limited to spears and crude axes and knives, while protection stops at tough furs, rough leather and – for tribes who've invented warfare – lightweight shields. Large structures must be assembled from unsmoothed wood and bark rope, although tribes with a lot of time to spend may raise monoliths and massive 'henge' monuments. Characters may also be surprisingly adept in some areas, such as astronomy and herbal medicine,

CORPS Dreamtime sets a game campaign among the Stone Age aborigines of Australia.

which raises one other point of interest. Neolithic (New Stone Britain saw the construction of Stonehenge, Avebury and other impressive monuments and tombs, demonstrating just what ca done with crude technology. Such projects suggest com organised societies, and could be used as the theme of a fair- campaign, if refs can persuade characters that this is a worthwhile

Social Organisation: Without efficient communications, groups in a low-tech world must usually be small – even though the above-menti monuments imply larger coalitions. M we are talking about tribes and c although that leaves a fair amount of s (Is the tribal chiefdom inherited, decide strength, or assigned by the spirits or priest Primitive societies have been depicte fiction as anything from ecological utopias to b anarchies. In truth, survival must demand a lot o operation and mutual trust within the group. On the hand, there is less reason for tribes to be nice to each o and strangers will probably be hated and despised at best, quite possibly killed on sight – outsiders may be regarded as human. (This, of course, suggests a strong campaign them group of exiled PCs can be faced with the problem of for a viable new tribe.)

Similar comments apply to such peoples' relatio with the environment. Many tribal cultures are very go preserving their world, and if 'nature spirits' are real, may well enforce such green attitudes. Then again, t moving into new areas won't know how to preserve local ecology, and may not care. It seems likely that an hunters wiped out countless species, from mamm through ground sloths to small birds, thousands of before anyone had heard of environmentalism.

Magic and the Supernatural: In a Stone culture, magic and religion are largely indistinguish The world is considered to be filled with spirits supernatural beings, which must be understood propitiated, and which may sometimes be manipul There may or may not be true gods – Sky Spirits, Ancestors, whatever – but much of the time, le local powers are the pressing concern. Similarly, t may be helpful shamans and malevolent witche sorcerers, but they are likely to be using similar s

Because magic is closely linked to dealings spirits, it is not an exact science but a practica involving willpower, local knowledge and n Characters who deal in such things – PCs or N – should be seen as strange and unpredict forever talking to invisible beings, slipping o spirit quests, and quite likely getting out of skulls on mushroom hallucinogens or h of chanting and sleep deprivation. M may not be much immediate us combat, but the ability to control a nature makes a shaman a fears opponent. He can't fireball you he can infect you and your fa with horrible diseases several miles away. looking to run such ga must be prepared to com with a whole invisible wor

spirits with non-human personalities and motivations. On the other hand, there are relatively few magic items to worry about, aside from spirit-haunted objects.

The Bronze Age and the First Cities

In ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, communities discovered that they could do astounding things to their food supply if they arranged irrigation on a large scale, which encouraged the growth of cities and the appearance of priest-kings to run everything. This era, with the birth of complex societies and written mythology, is a natural setting for tales of heroism.

These can be run in two distinct styles: gritty realism or mythic superheroism. The realistic version revolves around the complexities of survival, warfare and government, with characters building a civilisation from the ground up. The superheroic version draws on the hero-myths of the age, featuring hugely powerful characters travelling the world, battling monsters and dealing with the gods. With limited technology and untrustworthy magic, such characters must rely on their vast strength and determination in solving problems.

The visual style of any such game should be chunky, solid and straightforward, but not entirely crude. No-one has yet invented the arch or the dome, so the only safe way to build involves large slabs of stone or lots of mud brick. However, painting, carving, dying and decorative metalwork are coming along well, so those stone walls can be gaudy, and the priests and monarchs get to wander around in colourful kilts and jewellery. The peasants are less lucky – they probably wear plain loincloths, and have to haul those blasted stone slabs around.

Technology: As noted above, although some technology is fairly ingenious, this sort of setting is supposed to be low-tech, using brute force and heavy structures rather than sophisticated design. Literacy is the domain of scribes who write on clay tablets or expensive papyrus scrolls, or carve inscriptions on stone. The best metal is bronze, which can hold a good edge, but it's rare and expensive so stone is still widely used. Warriors must be wealthy to own even a bronze chest-plate – most use padded cloth armour, or rely on agility and luck.

There's one important piece of furniture to note: chariots. Historically, horse breeds were still weak and relatively slow, while harnesses hadn't been developed for safe, controlled riding. (Technically, riding and cavalry tactics evolved through the latter part of the Bronze Age, but games can ignore them altogether.) Chariots, on the other hand, were a swift and deadly weapon, although the expense of maintaining two or more horses, a vehicle and preferably an underling to handle the driving, limited them to the nobility, or at least a warrior elite – lower-class rabble had to walk. If the game system you are using doesn't have rules for chariot combat, you'll have to invent some; in brief, a well-built chariot can probably move at its horses' full galloping speed, but cornering can be problematic, and only the best designs can cross rough country without falling to pieces. In some cases, such as the Homeric Greeks, warriors used the chariot to ride up to the enemy lines, intimidating opponents as they went, then jumped off and fought heroic duels on foot. Others, such as the Egyptians, preferred to stay on board, rushing around the battlefield while bombarding the enemy with arrows and javelins.

Social Organisation: The key to this setting is the city, which is the epicentre of a system of irrigation, food distribution, religion and

There are a few historical novels set in the Bronze Age, including Robert Silverberg's *Gilgamesh the King*. You can also find translations of the original myths of the era, including the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

There is a whole genre of Stone Age novels, of varying levels of plausibility. The best known are probably Jean M Auel's series, beginning with *The Clan of the Cave Bear*. For a comedy campaign, see *The Evolution Man*, by Roy Lewis.

Persuading

Some RPGers are extremely set in their ways, and may take some convincing that fantasy worlds can be non-medieval. Even once the game starts, they may need periodic reminders that things work differently here. Give them time, and a good campaign, and they should come around in the end.

But if they don't – well, there's only so much you can do. RPGs are a collaborative process, and you can't make people have fun. The best time to catch them is probably when they've just said that they are bored with an old-style game, and preferably when they're talking about how interesting a good setting can be.

defence. Of course, most people have to live outside, in the rural villages which produce food, but only a barbarian or an outcast doesn't belong to a city-state. The cities are ruled by priests, or kings who claim descent from the gods, and the temples may control the class of scribes who hold the system together. Some cities grow strong enough to expand, conquering their neighbours and demanding tribute. Eventually empires develop, although these can be fragile, depending on good harvests, mineral reserves and the failure of oppressed cities to unite against them.

Magic and the Supernatural: Each city tends to have a patron god, and pantheons consist of gods' families (and enemies), who may unite when one city conquers or allies with another. The god of a dominant city may emerge as Lord of Creation. Priests act as intermediaries between men and gods, they may have regular dealings with divine emissaries and servants.

Beneath the gods are populations of lesser spirits, angelic beings, guardians and ghosts. Magic, now more separate from religion, is still rather shamanistic, depending on the summoning and propitiation of spirits. Magicians may deal mostly with nature spirits, the beings that cause diseases, or the dead, or different classes of magician may specialise in various categories. They are experts in summonings, bindings and exorcisms. Displays of raw personal power, such as fireballs or levitation, are rare, and the magician may be assumed to be invoking a spirit to achieve the effect.

Next month we take a leap forward through the earth's past to the early Greek and Chinese periods. Look out for arcane II on Friday 6th September.

Research

However loosely your gameworld may be based on an historical era, it makes sense to research that basis – this will give you a feel for the style, and throw up new ideas that you can adapt for play.

An obvious place to start is any good encyclopedia or general history book. Take some time with this, then, once you've picked up a general outline, start reading specialist history books. And don't be ashamed to pick up children's histories – these are usually designed to explain to beginners what day-to-day life in a period was like, which is far more important here than names of kings or legal details, and they often have a lot of attractive illustrations which may serve as character portraits or for scene-setting. Also, if your PCs are going to be combat-orientated, look out for wargamers' and military modellers' reference books.

Of course, there are also plenty of relevant RPG supplements, including *GURPS* historical worldbooks, ICE's *Campaign Classics* and TSR's 'green cover' *AD&D* volumes.

Lastly, historical and historically-based fantasy novels may be worth a look – some are well researched, while others make up in atmosphere what they lack in detail.

New Worlds

Technologically, the great Pre-Columbian American civilisations – the Maya, Incas and Aztecs – were late Stone Age; they could smelt only a few metals for decoration, and they lacked wheeled vehicles (largely because the Americas had no large domesticable animals). However, they built great cities with complex societies, easily comparable to Babylon or Nineveh.

Key features here include a hot climate – the Mayans' cities are surrounded by jungle – and lots of ritual. Big temples are the order of the day, along with spectacular costumes. The Aztecs were fond of human sacrifice; while the Conquistadors who defeated them were unpleasant people, it's easy to set up pseudo-Aztecs as a villain culture in a gameworld. Other Pre-Columbians were less appalling, although most seem to have gone in for the occasional human sacrifice if they thought the gods wanted it. Refs may prefer to leave this out, or to restrict it to the worshippers of evil gods.

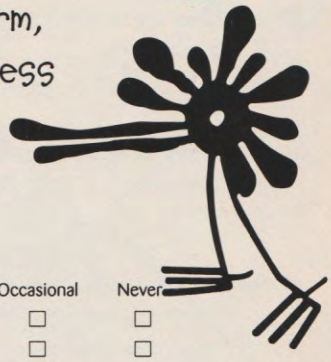
Technology: Pre-Columbian America demonstrates what can be done with stone tools, organisation and generations of experience. Buildings were constructed without mortar, but the stones were cut and ground to match perfectly; precipitous mountain-sides were shaped into agricultural terraces; weapons had volcanic glass edges which were as sharp as any metal; and messages travelled by relays of runners. Meanwhile, strange writing systems based on intricate glyphs or knotted strings were used to record superb astronomical observations or advanced mathematics. (In a fantasy world, all this might be augmented by magic, of course.)

Social Organisation: These societies' emperors might consider themselves gods, and spend much time performing religious duties. The upper classes and the priesthood had great power, but also stringent duties. The peasantry had to perform the building work to keep the empires running, but this was probably a matter of quasi-feudal responsibilities – the system of scribes and runners wasn't powerful enough to let the capital run everything.

Magic and the Supernatural: The gods of ancient America were thought to grant their priests powers – at least so long as the necessary rituals were performed. Priests might dress and disguise themselves as their gods, and thus obtain some of the deity's powers. However, priesthood was probably a full-time job, not necessarily suitable for PC adventurers. There were also sorcerers, physicians and soothsayers who would be expected to know some quasi-magical techniques – but the true sorcerers were often regarded with suspicion.

Reader Survey

It's time to find out just what you think of **arcane**! Fill in the form, send it to the usual **arcane** address, include your name and address and you could win either a box of *Mirage* boosters or more than £100 worth of *AD&D* kit. So, get scribbling!



1 **Do you subscribe to arcane?** Yes ☐ No ☐

2 **How many issues of arcane have you bought?**

All of them	☐	9 out of 10	☐8 out of 10	☐
7 out of 10	☐	6 out of 10	☐5 out of 10	☐
4 out of 10	☐	3 out of 10	☐2 out of 10	☐
1 out of 10	☐			

3 **What originally made you buy arcane?**

- It is a gaming/roleplaying magazine ☐
- I was interested in the cover feature(s) ☐
- I saw it advertised in another publication ☐
- It was recommended to me ☐
- Other (please specify) _____

4 **How many people including yourself are likely to read your copy of arcane?**

1 only ☐ 2-3 ☐ 4-5 ☐ 6 or more ☐

5 **Which was your favourite/least favourite issue?**

	Favourite	Least Favourite		Favourite	Least Favourite
Issue 1	☐	☐	Issue 6	☐	☐
Issue 2	☐	☐	Issue 7	☐	☐
Issue 3	☐	☐	Issue 8	☐	☐
Issue 4	☐	☐	Issue 9	☐	☐
Issue 5	☐	☐	Issue 10	☐	☐

6 **Which was your favourite/least favourite cover?**

	Favourite	Least Favourite		Favourite	Least Favourite
Issue 1	☐	☐	Issue 6	☐	☐
Issue 2	☐	☐	Issue 7	☐	☐
Issue 3	☐	☐	Issue 8	☐	☐
Issue 4	☐	☐	Issue 9	☐	☐
Issue 5	☐	☐	Issue 10	☐	☐

7 **What other magazines of any kind do you regularly read?**

	Every issue	Most issues	Occasional	Never
Batman	☐	☐	☐	☐
C&VG	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dragon	☐	☐	☐	☐
Empire	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fortean Times	☐	☐	☐	☐
Interactive Fantasy	☐	☐	☐	☐
InQuest	☐	☐	☐	☐
Match	☐	☐	☐	☐
NME	☐	☐	☐	☐
Preacher	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q	☐	☐	☐	☐
SFX	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shivers	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shoot	☐	☐	☐	☐
Starburst	☐	☐	☐	☐

...other magazines you read regularly.

	Every issue	Most issues	Occasional	Never
The Duelist	☐	☐	☐	☐
Valkyrie	☐	☐	☐	☐
Viz	☐	☐	☐	☐
White Dwarf	☐	☐	☐	☐
2000 AD	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other (please specify)_____

8 **What do you consider to be arcane's most important features?**

	Very Important	Important	Not Important
arcane scribblings	☐	☐	☐
Boardgames coverage	☐	☐	☐
Collectable card coverage	☐	☐	☐
Despatches	☐	☐	☐
Encounters	☐	☐	☐
LARP coverage	☐	☐	☐
Play-by-email coverage	☐	☐	☐
Play-by-mail coverage	☐	☐	☐
RPG coverage	☐	☐	☐
The covers	☐	☐	☐
The features	☐	☐	☐
The game reviews	☐	☐	☐
The Great Library	☐	☐	☐

9 **How would you rate the following in arcane?**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Weak
arcane scribblings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Boardgame coverage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Collectable card coverage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Despatches	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Encounters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
LARP coverage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Play-by-email coverage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Play-by-mail coverage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
RPG coverage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The covers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The features	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The game reviews	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Great Library	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10 **Do you play roleplaying games?** Yes ☐ No ☐

If not, please go to question 16

11 **What are your favourite games?**

Espionage	☐	Fantasy	☐
Historical	☐	Horror	☐
Military/Mercenary	☐	Science Fiction	☐
Superhero	☐		

Other (please specify)_____

Reader Survey...

12 What are your three favourite roleplaying systems?
Specify: 1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

13 Which three systems do you play the most?
Specify: 1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

14 Do you spend more time as a referee or as a player?
Player ☐ Referee ☐

15 How often do you play roleplaying games?
once a week ☐ once a fortnight ☐
twice a week ☐ once a month ☐
more than twice a week ☐ less than once a month ☐

16 Do you play collectable card games? Yes ☐ No ☐
If not, please go directly to question 20

17 How often do you play collectable card games?
once a week ☐ once a fortnight ☐
twice a week ☐ once a month ☐
more than twice a week ☐ less than once a month ☐

18 What are your three favourite collectable card games?
Specify: 1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

19 Which three collectable card games do you play the most?
Specify: 1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

20 Do you play miniature systems? Yes ☐ No ☐
If not please go directly to question 24

21 How often do you play miniature systems?
once a week ☐ once a fortnight ☐
twice a week ☐ once a month ☐
more than twice a week ☐ less than once a month ☐

22 What are your three favourite systems?
Specify: 1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

23 Which three systems do you play the most?
Specify: 1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

24 Do you play boardgames? Yes ☐ No ☐
If not, please go directly to question 28

25 How often do you play boardgames?
once a week ☐ once a fortnight ☐
twice a week ☐ once a month ☐
more than twice a week ☐ less than once a month ☐

26 What are your three favourite boardgames?
Specify: 1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

27 Which three favourite boardgames do you play the most?
Specify: 1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

28 Do you play-by-mail? Yes ☐ No ☐
If not, please go directly to question 30

29 How often do you play-by-mail?
once a week ☐ once a fortnight ☐
twice a week ☐ once a month ☐
more than twice a week ☐ less than once a month ☐

30 Do you play-by-email? Yes ☐ No ☐
If not, please go directly to question 32

31 How often do you play-by-email?
once week ☐ once a fortnight ☐
twice a week ☐ once a month ☐
more than twice a week ☐ less than once a month ☐

32 Do you do live action roleplaying? Yes ☐ No ☐
If not, please go directly to question 34

33 How often do you do live action roleplaying games?
once a week ☐ once a fortnight ☐
twice a week ☐ once a month ☐
more than twice a week ☐ less than once a month ☐

34 Which of the following do you own/intend to own?
PC ☐ Playstation ☐
Apple Mac ☐ 16 bit console (SNES, MEGA etc) ☐
Amiga ☐ 32 or 64 bit console (Saturn etc) ☐
Other (please specify) _____

35 Which of the following do you not own but have access to?
PC ☐ Playstation ☐
Apple Mac ☐ 16 bit console (SNES, MEGA etc) ☐
Amiga ☐ 32 or 64 bit console (Saturn, etc) ☐
Other (please specify) _____

36 Do you have access to the Internet? (Tick all that apply.)
at home ☐ at work ☐
at school/college ☐ at a friend's ☐

37 What are your favourite types of computer games?
Adventure RPG ☐ Flight sims ☐
Sports games ☐ Arcade games ☐
Strategy/war games ☐
Other (please specify) _____

38 Will you attend any RPG conventions in the next 12 months?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Possibly ☐

39 How much money do you intend to spend on games in the next 12 months?

	Segments by RPGs	Collectable card games	miniatures	boardgames	Computer games
Less than £20	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
£21 - £50	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
£51 - £100	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
£101 - £200	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
£201 or more	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please feel free to include any additional comments about how you think **arcane** can be improved.

The tenth in a series of collectable encounters presented in
#10
arcane
PULL OUT & KEEP
ENCOUNTERS
KEEP OUT
H.M.Government
Ministry of Defence
The Dig
The military has sealed off the area. The scientists are refusing to comment. Just what secrets does the archaeological dig hide? Now is the time of discovery... by Ken and Jo Walton

The Dig

arcane *presents another thrilling 11-page encounter which you can use in any post-Victorian campaign.*

Professor Parkinson banged his fist on the packing case. "The situation is intolerable!" He was red in the face with fury. "I'm trying to conduct serious scientific work here, work vital to our understanding of history, and the next thing I know, the whole place is cordoned off, swarming with soldiers, and I'm told none of my staff can leave the site. And then that damn fool Smethurst had to go and disappear, which has only made the matter worse. I mean, look at the place!" He gestured out over the sandy ground. The sky was darkening with evening, and shadows lay in the numerous pits and trenches that had been dug in the hard earth. Crumbling walls and pillars stood up on all sides, and lengths of string were stretched between pegs where the archaeologists had been working. The place was deserted now, the workers huddled together at the far side of the site, talking in hushed voices. A high fence had been thrown up around the entire area, and armed men walked back and forth on patrol. Maybe it was just an illusion, but it seemed that a pale glow was coming from the deep pit in the centre of the site...

An archaeological site is a mysterious place where anything can be discovered, from alien artifacts to wights and Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. In many ways archaeologists can be considered grave-robbers – although their motives are different the end results are not. They never consider, as they break their way through the defences the ancient people put around their burial chambers, that those defences may have been put there for a reason by people who knew what was going on. All archaeological sites are creepy places. Sensitive people are always aware of the possibility of the ghosts of former inhabitants coming to find out who has disturbed their bones and possessions. Archaeology only really came into vogue within the last century, and so is unsuitable for any campaigns set earlier than the Victorian period.

This dig is a barrow grave at which something mysterious has been discovered. For those who want a modern horror scenario, we've provided one in Watcher from the Stars (see page 49). Other possibilities for different genres are also mentioned.

The System

You're bound to notice that, even though we present character descriptions for the people you find at The Dig, we don't provide you with any stats. That's a deliberate decision – you're supposed to be able to use this encounter with all manner of RPGs, so there's no way we could provide stats for all of the possibilities. That shouldn't be a problem for you, though – just make up the stats for these characters yourself, using the descriptions as a starting point. Same goes for other 'system' details – make them up to fit your particular campaign.

The Site

The dig site is an ancient British burial mound. Half the mound has been cut away, revealing the stone supports and the central burial chamber. A single ancient skeleton lies within, together with a bronze dagger and a (broken) string of clay beads. A couple of trenches have been dug, and have reached a strange layer of black alien substance underneath. This substance has, in turn, been cut away (with the help of a powerful laser beam). A pale, eldritch glow emanates from the opening, which leads to the beacon chamber.

Around the outside of the site, the military has put up a hefty chain-link fence, topped with razor wire. There is a gate into the site, large enough for vehicles to get through, which is watched at all times by two guards. Another pair of guards patrols the perimeter.

Illustrations ©Simon Gurr & arcane

The Chamber

This room is the core of the mystery. What is inside this room will be at the heart of the adventure of the dig. This may be an alien artifact, an ancient horror, evidence of Atlantean civilisation, ghosts, barrow wights, a door to another reality, a door to the time when the barrow was built, an entrance to a strange underground complex and so on. Possibilities are endless. See the scenario and adventure seeds for more detailed suggestions.

The only entrance to the beacon chamber is the hole cut in the top of the room by the military's lasers. If the earth were dug away from the chamber all round, it would be found to be a featureless black cube, resting on the bedrock.

People

Professor Parkinson

Professor Bertrand G Parkinson is an academic of the old school. Brought up in a well-educated upper-middle-class family, he went to the best schools and the most prestigious university, where he now holds the Chair of Archaeology. He is undoubtedly a genius, able to make amazing intuitive leaps which leave his colleagues green with envy. He has a knack of finding remnants of ancient civilisations where others thought there couldn't possibly be any, and he has lost count of the historically important (not to say valuable) treasures he has brought back to the world's museums. He is also quite insufferable to work with. He treats the students on the dig with him as his personal servants, and expects them to work extremely hard at all hours of the day or night. He certainly doesn't suffer fools gladly. Professor Parkinson is in his late fifties, and has white hair and a neatly trimmed moustache. He wears a rumpled suit. When he was younger he used to box for his university, but his athletic days are long over now. In more recent years he has only fought in the pages of respected academic journals.

Professor's Quote (to ignorant peasant):
"For God's sake, man! Don't you know the difference between Doric and Ionic? Ignorant peasant!"

Colonel Renton

The Colonel is a somewhat sinister figure. He wears a uniform, and is obviously part of the military, but has no badge showing his regiment. He constantly wears mirror shades, even indoors, and it is impossible to tell if he is watching you or not. He has arrived with a group of soldiers in similar uniforms, and cordoned off the area of the dig, though no-one quite knows why. He is actually working for a top secret department of the government, which investigates UFO sightings and such like, with the intention of finding information which could be of use to the military. He is heavily armed, and has troops within easy call. He is lean, athletic, intelligent, and capable of assessing people as well as making deductions about what is going on.

Renton's Quote:
"I'm afraid I can't reveal that information, in the interests of national security, sir."

Dr. Beatrice Nelson

Beatrice Nelson did her PhD under Parkinson and has been with him ever since. She is a middle-aged woman who looks older than she is. She wears her hair in a bun. Her glasses are mended with green tape, and she wears overalls at all times, usually with various archaeological implements and discoveries carelessly tucked into the pockets. Archaeology is her life and her passion. She worships the Professor and regards him as a genius. He considers her to be very useful, has furthered her career and always brings her with him on field work. Some people have said that many of Parkinson's discoveries were actually made by Bea. Both of them deny this. It is in fact true that her diligent work has uncovered things that Parkinson's enthusiastic methods might not have found. She is also good at dealing with diggers and calming them down after Parkinson has antagonised them. She is generally tactful, but self absorbed. She lacks confidence and, unlike the Professor, is aware that archaeology is not the whole world.

Nelson's Quote:
"I say, Professor, look, I've found a fibula! Ionic columns are more fluted. But don't worry about it. It's not important. I doubt the Professor can tell a carrot from a cauliflower, some days!"

John Smethurst

John Smethurst is Professor Parkinson's long-suffering assistant. A small, bespectacled man, with a slight stutter and a humble manner, he has been the butt of Parkinson's temper for many years. Why he puts up with the constant abuse, no-one knows. The reason is that he's a 'sleeper' for the same government department to which Colonel Renton belongs.

Smethurst's Quote:
"Yes, I'm sure you're right, p-p-p-professor. It must have been m-m-m-m-my fault."

Cyndi Goodwin

Cyndi Goodwin is one of Professor Parkinson's students, here to help out on the dig. She is currently in her second year at university, studying archaeology, and is 20 years old. She is American and extremely beautiful, even in the less-than-fashionable overalls Beatrice Nelson insists the helpers wear at all times. She is almost six feet tall with long curly red hair and stunning green eyes. She is also trained in oriental martial arts, and is confident of being able to take on any attacker, no matter who they are or how fearsome they seem. Her boyfriend is one of the other diggers on the site. She certainly works hard when she gets down to it, but Cyndi will not pretend to be more enthusiastic than she is. When the day's work is done she likes to have a good time. She persistently gets into confrontational arguments with Beatrice about the way she is expected to behave during work hours, is forever teasing Smethurst and annoys Professor Parkinson with her insubordination. In fact, as well as being what she appears to be, she is also a CIA sleeper agent. As soon as she suspects what is going on she will attempt to contact her superiors. She may recruit any Americans she meets to help in this, or any other PCs she feels she can trust. She is a particularly good judge of character.

Goodwin's Quote:

"A fibula, gee whizz, we found six of those already! Why don't we all go out for a drink?"

Adventure Seeds

The scenario below is just one way in which the dig can be used. Artifact 126A could be any number of things. Here are a few ideas:

Gateway

In a game in any era, the artifact could turn out to be a gateway to another world, or another dimension. Maybe the PCs will go and explore this strange new world. Or maybe a horde of invaders (aliens, demons etc) will pour through, bent on world conquest.

Thing Man Was Not Meant to Know

In a 1920s horror game, the artifact could be a Thing Man Was Not Meant to Know, held in suspended animation by ancient magic, and now let loose upon the world to feed on human souls. The tomb might have been built specifically as a trap for the ancient menace, which has waited underground, either asleep or fully aware, and getting angrier and angrier throughout the millennia. Or it may have chosen to hide in the barrow, emerging occasionally at its own will.

Haunted Barrow

In any game the barrow could be haunted by the ghosts of its previous inhabitants. If a creepy atmosphere is desired, have the PCs approach the site first when it is deserted, and stress the way in which the ancient artifacts and the archaeologists' tools all seem to have been abandoned by people who thought they were coming back. Other effective ways of developing the right atmosphere include mentioning how mysterious the precautions of the barrow builders are, and the use of local legends about the site. Have the PCs stop and ask a local the way only to be warned off. A specific legend may be used to provide a clue as to what is there and how it can be defeated.

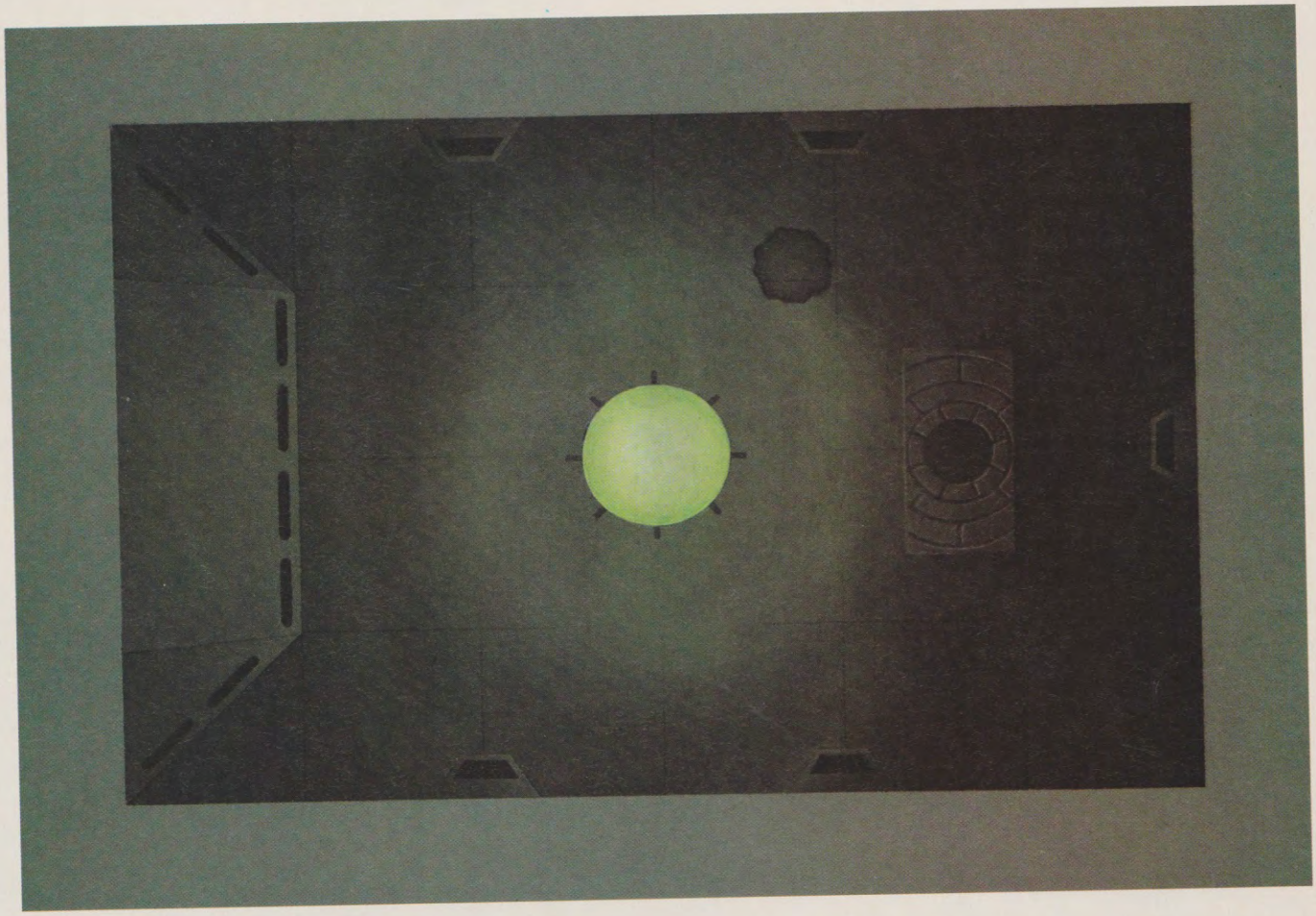
Sidhe Mound

In a game set in any era Celtic mythology could be used, with the Chamber being a gate to the Celtic Otherworld. The Sidhe were said to have withdrawn into a world of their own inside the barrows. In this case it would be as well to set the scene in advance with legends and warnings. There is folklore in many parts of Britain about people who go into mounds like this and emerge, after what appears to them a single night of feasting, to find that hundreds of years have passed in the world outside. This could be what has happened to Smethurst – and the same could happen to the PCs. Or someone could wander out at any minute who wandered in during the Civil War.

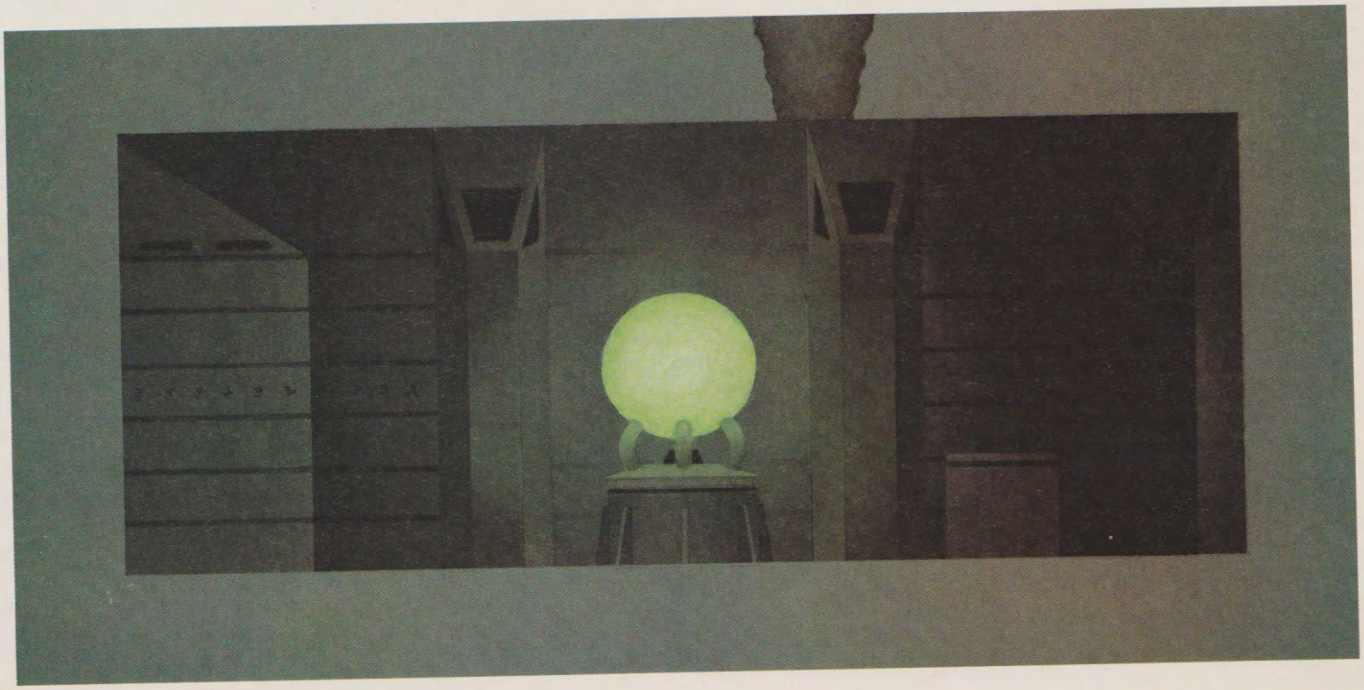
Alien Horrors

In a futuristic horror game, the chamber could conceal an alien parasite or egg, which will infest a human host or go on a killing spree. If the dig is in a remote location, it could kill off the members of the archaeological team one by one. If the dig is in a city, it could escape into the sewers,

The Chamber 1.1 top view



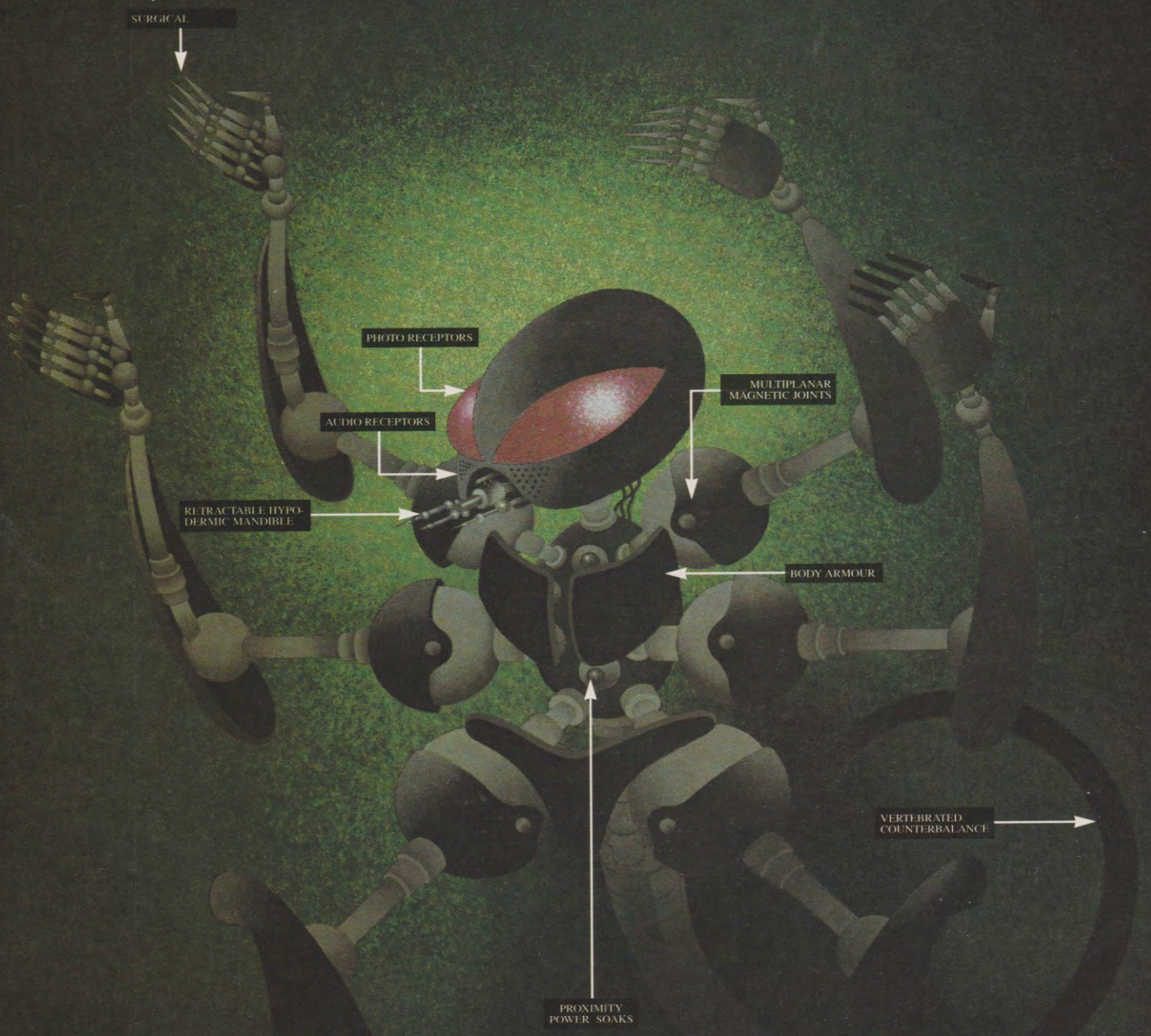
The Chamber 1.2 side view



4
3
2
8

1 Half of barrow (other half removed)
2 Dead ancient Briton
3 Inner ring of support stones
4 Outer ring of support stones
5 Trench
6 Plank bridge
7 Alien 'teflon' laid bare
8 Hole into chamber cut by laser
9 Razor wire topped fence
10 Gate
1
(sentry box)
10
9
7
6
5
(site office)
maps © arcane illustrated by Keith Jackson

The Watcher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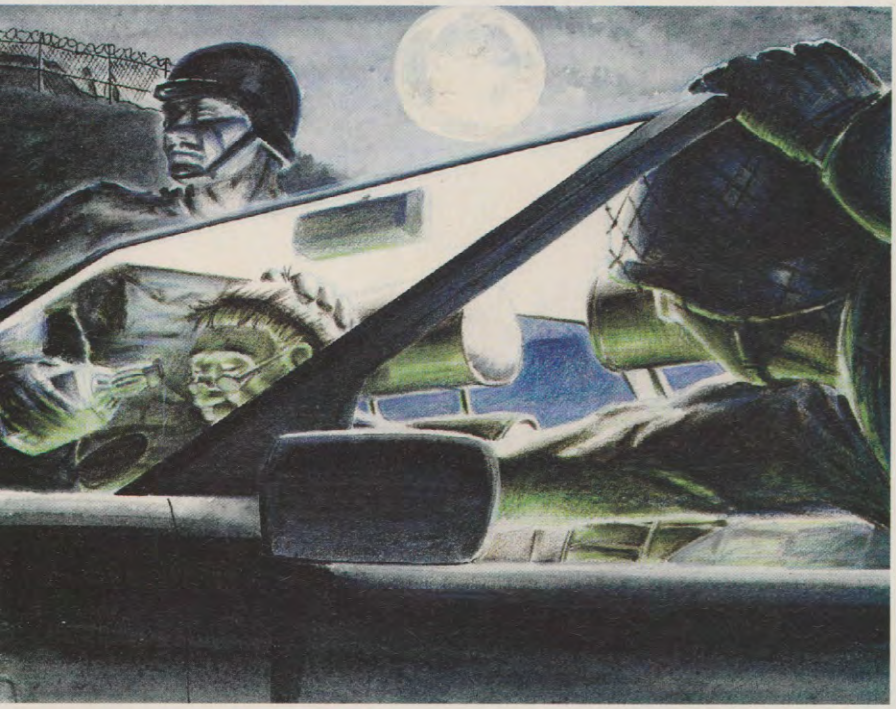
where it must be tracked down by the PCs before it causes mayhem, or worse still, breeds...

Alien Mysteries

In a space opera game, the dig could be on an alien world. The artifact could be evidence about what happened to the original race on the planet, or clues leading to the inevitable conclusion that they are about to return. The Watcher can be used exactly as it appears below. Alternatively, the members of the alien race who built the barrow are considered extinct. But actually they could be discovered during the excavation living in tunnels underground. If they occasionally emerge and claim a victim, the PCs might well draw the wrong conclusion and believe, until they explore the tunnels, that they are dealing with a supernatural mystery.



Superheroes

In a Supers game, the artifact could be an immensely powerful being, with plans to take over the world. Alternatively, it could be the one substance that can weaken a Super.

Dark Lord's Tomb

In a fantasy game, the dig could lead to a series of passages and tunnels (trapped, of course), which have become inhabited by wild beasts and the undead minions of the evil dark lord whose tomb this ruin was. The artifact could be the crown of the deceased dark lord himself – whoever puts it on will gain the dark lord's magical powers and his desire to conquer the world. The professor will, of course, be a madman, or an out and out grave-robber.

Conspiracy

In a 20th century game the chamber can contain something which reveals the Truth – whatever that may be. An ancient map showing Atlantis, evidence of advanced technology, proof that history is a hoax, a way to activate the ley lines and bring magic back into the world – the possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

Inspiration

For good ideas about the sort of things you can do with archaeological digs (and the like) in an RPG, the following films may provide inspiration: *Alien*, any of the *Indiana Jones* films, *Quatermass and the Pit*, and *Stargate*. RPGs likely to be of use with this scenario include *Call of Cthulhu, GURPS Cliffhangers/GURPS Horror, The World of Indiana Jones, Conspiracy X, Don't Look Back, Chill* and *Nephilim*.

Watcher from the Stars

The following short scenario should, with a little tweaking, fit into most modern-day horror/conspiracy games. It could be set anywhere in Britain, or abroad for that matter, if the archaeological details are altered accordingly.

The Past

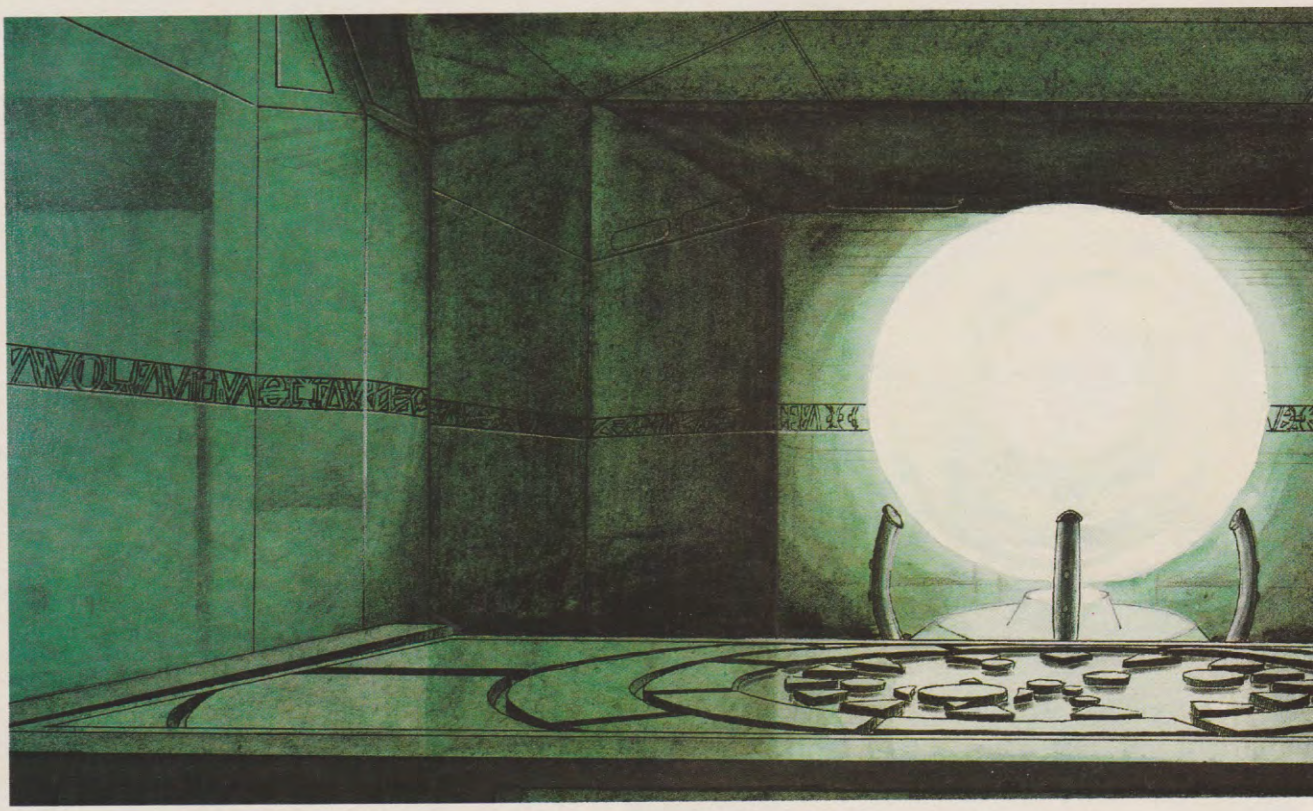
A million years ago, an alien craft landed briefly in what would one day become the British Isles. Those aboard found little to interest them, but thought that the planet may repay further study in a million years or two. They left a hyperwave beacon to mark the planet for future explorers, and then left to continue their galactic survey. The beacon was hidden in a chamber underground, but in case the chamber was breached by geological activity, or the activities of the inhabitants of the planet, a guardian was left in the chamber. This Watcher was an artificial construct, which would wait patiently and only attack if the beacon was threatened. Unfortunately, the centuries of waiting have made its neural circuits a little mad, and it now sees everything as a potential threat.

The Present

Professor Parkinson and his students have been doing a 'rescue' dig on an ancient British barrow grave which is about to be flattened for a new motorway (the M666?). The barrow has long been thought haunted. Certainly there are strange electrical effects in the area – compasses go haywire, there is a lot of static electricity, the hairs on people's necks bristle in a creepy manner and battery-operated items seem to run out

of power sooner than expected. These are all effects of the alien beacon and the Watcher guarding it.

Digging below the level of the central grave, the Professor found a strange black substance, very tough and with a texture something like that of teflon (the stuff on non-stick pans). It was obviously not natural rock, but was certainly beyond anything the ancient Brits could have made. None of the equipment the archaeologist had with him would make a dent in the stuff, so he sent for heavier equipment and waited somewhat impatiently.



In the meantime, Smethurst got his act together. He sent a coded message to his military superiors, who immediately went into action, removing the professor from the site and cordoning it off. Bringing in the latest laser cutting gear, they have managed to broach the chamber of the alien beacon. At the moment the Watcher is dormant, but with nightfall it is beginning to awaken, its power cells charged with the energy it is sucking from the electrical systems round about. Soon it will be fully awake and will go on the rampage.

Smethurst, in the meantime, has met with a nasty 'accident'. After telling his superiors about the find, he felt somewhat cheated by their lack of gratitude for his years of suffering at the hands of the Professor. He decided to sell his story to the newspapers, and was on his way to do it when his colleagues caught up with him. Pumped full of alcohol, he was put behind the wheel of a car, and pushed off a convenient steep bend in the road.

The Watcher

(The Watcher is referred to as Artifact 126B by the military. Artifact 126A is the beacon. What the other 125+ artifacts were is anybody's guess).

The Watcher is a black, semi-humanoid robot with six limbs. Its top two limbs end in delicate six-fingered hands topped with razor sharp claws. Its middle limbs can be used for running, or for grasping victims more firmly. Its rear limbs are used exclusively for running. It has a heavy tail which it uses as a counterbalance when running, and which can also be swung as a weapon. The head of the Watcher has two red glowing eyes which can see into the infra-red range of the spectrum. Its mouth contains a needle which can inject a paralysing poison into a victim. It has an internal power supply, which will last eight hours, but can replenish this by draining energy from nearby electrical sources (anything within 20 yards can be drained in this way). It can also draw energy from sunlight. When it's in the beacon chamber, it draws power directly from the beacon's fusion generator.

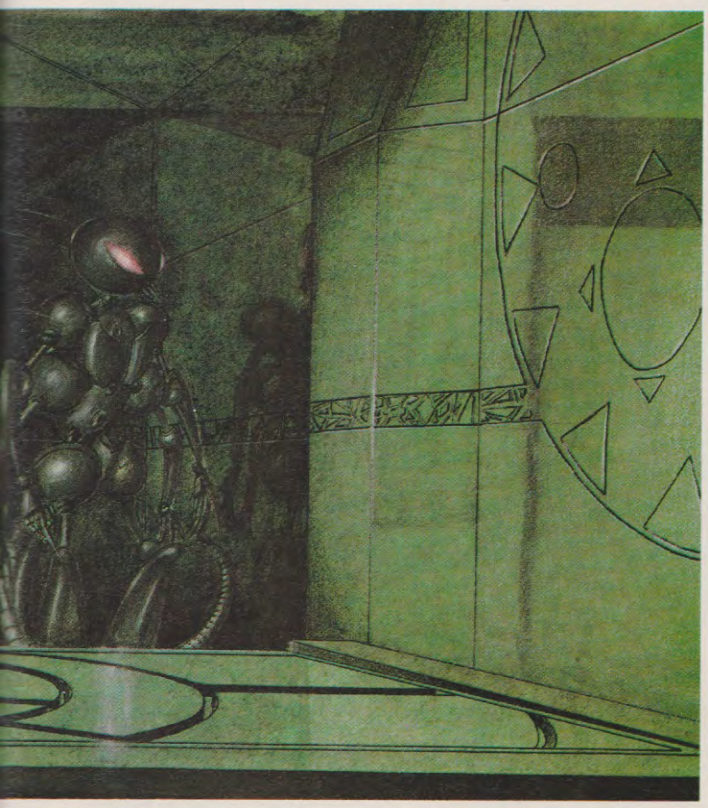
The Watcher was originally designed to guard the beacon, with a secondary program which allowed any creatures killed in the beacon's defence to be dissected, and the information so gained stored in the Watcher's data-banks for when the aliens returned. Unfortunately, its programming has been scrambled over the millennia, and now its motives are to leave the beacon chamber, catch someone or something (it doesn't differentiate between people, cattle, dogs etc), take it back to the chamber, dissect its victim, then go out and find another one.

Inside The Chamber

Its smooth black walls are inscribed with writing in a flowing alien script. There is also a strange pattern on one wall, which, with the right knowledge of astronomy and mathematics, would allow an expert to deduce that the aliens came from Sirius (known as Sothis to ancient Egyptians and students of the Occult). In the centre of the chamber is a plinth, on which is a pale sphere,

slightly warm to the touch, which seems to glow slightly with an inner light. This is connected by numerous pipes, wires and tubes (heavily protected) to the plinth. This is the beacon, which sends out hyperwave transmissions to any alien craft passing within ten light years of Earth. Unfortunately, the signals cannot be detected by any technology known to modern man, unless of course some secret group has access to alien technology itself.

Behind the plinth is another slab, with channels for liquids to flow off and go down a drain in the floor. It is designed for



dissecting animals, but on first sight is reminiscent of sacrificial altars. On the other side of the beacon from the slab, there is an inner chamber, where the Watcher stands when not active. The door can only be spotted by someone examining the wall very closely, and could only be opened from the outside by someone with very powerful (and bulky) laser cutting gear. If the Watcher is present when someone enters the chamber, the door will burst open suddenly, and the Watcher will leap forth.

The Adventure

There are a number of ways in which the PCs can get involved. Maybe they are students on the dig. Or they could be investigators, trying to find out the truth about Smethurst's death (they could be alerted to the suspicious circumstances if one of them knows he was teetotal). Perhaps Smethurst actually managed to sell his story to a newspaper, and the PCs are reporters sent out to cover it. Or they could be part of Colonel Renton's organisation (though if that is the case, you might want to make it a little less sinister).

After seven hours with a high-powered laser, the military finally manages to cut into the beacon chamber just after sunset. After shining their torches into the chamber, they decide to leave things until the morning, when better lighting equipment is due to arrive. The Watcher does not attack immediately, because no-one has entered the chamber. But during the night it emerges from the chamber and, under the commands of its warped programming, begins seeking out its first victim.

Remember that the site of the dig is isolated – there are no towns or villages for at least 25 miles, though there may be an isolated farmhouse or two. There is a small army camp on one side of the site, containing ten soldiers, and a camp containing the Professor and six students on the other. Optionally, there may be a small community of anti-motorway protesters living in tree-houses nearby. If one of their number goes missing, they will undoubtedly blame it on the military, who they are convinced were sent in to scare them off. (Curiously enough, the discovery of an alien artifact means the motorway will almost certainly not be built!)

Getting away from the site will be extremely difficult. Vehicles will stop working as the Watcher drains their batteries, and the Watcher can run faster than a bicycle. Mobile phones will fade out for the same reason. There's a public call box five miles down the road, but unfortunately it's a very dark, narrow road, which runs through the middle of some dense woodland.

How can the Watcher be beaten? It's more or less impervious to ordinary bullets. An anti-tank missile might do it, but the military didn't bring one, and anyway, it wants to capture the thing undamaged.

One possibility is to get it in a dark place (a barn, perhaps) and keep it running around until its energy supplies run out. Another possibility is to decipher the alien script on the wall of the beacon chamber, which will give the code sequence to be broadcast to the Watcher to deactivate it. The only other possibilities are to lure it into a trap it can't get out of, or over a cliff, or down a mine-shaft. Or perhaps there's some heavy earthmoving equipment nearby (there is a motorway being built, after all), and a fight between the creature and a back-hoe loader could ensue.

The Future

Assuming the PCs survive their encounter with the Watcher, what then? The military isn't going to want them spreading their story – remember what happened to Smethurst. And maybe the uncovering of the beacon has triggered some switch and the aliens will be returning – to bring peace and love to the world, to make the Earth part of their interstellar empire, or to harvest a nice crop of tasty humans.

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Issue 2 explored *AD&D: Skills & Powers*, previewed 1996's big releases, interviewed Richard Garfield (*Magic's* inventor) and starred The Golden Dragon Inn, a 16-page Encounters special.

Issue 3 had a complete, free RPG called *Skool Roolz*, reviewed *Cybergeneration* and *Warhammer Fantasy Battle CD-ROM*, had an article on making your characters more quirky and featured Mr Smith's Trans-dimensional Emporium as our pull-out Encounter.

Issue 4 explained roleplaying for beginners, discussed the role of acting in gaming, reviewed *MIddle-earth: The Wizards, Legend of the Five Rings* and *Night Below*, while Stormburg, the flying extra-planar city materialised in this issue's pull-out Encounters section.

Issue 5 included Richard Garfield's thoughts on *Netrunner*, advice on wars, a feature on the roleplaying scene in Japan and reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages, Don't Look Back, Mage: The Ascension* and *Heresy*. It also had The Train pull into the Encounters section.

Issue 6 explained why the Christian right want to ban roleplaying games, took a look at the strange worlds of Steampunk, and reviewed *Netrunner*, the best card game since *Magic, GURPS Goblins* and *Space Hulk 2nd Edition*. We also gave you a Keep in the Encounter.

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Discover how to create the perfect horror scenario
Conspiracy X

Issue 7 explored the worlds of terror with our feature on how to create the perfect horror scenario. It looked at introducing time travel into your games, sent you to Prison with the month's Encounter, poked fun at the way roleplayers view their dice and reviewed *Conspiracy X*.

Issue 8 suggested many a way that you can introduce some mysticism back into the magic systems of your fantasy games. We also gave you the chance to try out 20 play-by-mail games for free, and we reviewed *Pendragon 4th Edition, Axis Mundi* for *Werewolf* and *Alliances*.

Issue 9 showed you how to improve your roleplaying character and playing skills. We also poked fun at refereeing mistakes and explained why soap operas can be a good source of ideas. The Encounter visited RackModulo Inc., and *Wraith: The Oblivion* and *Dragon Storm* were reviewed.

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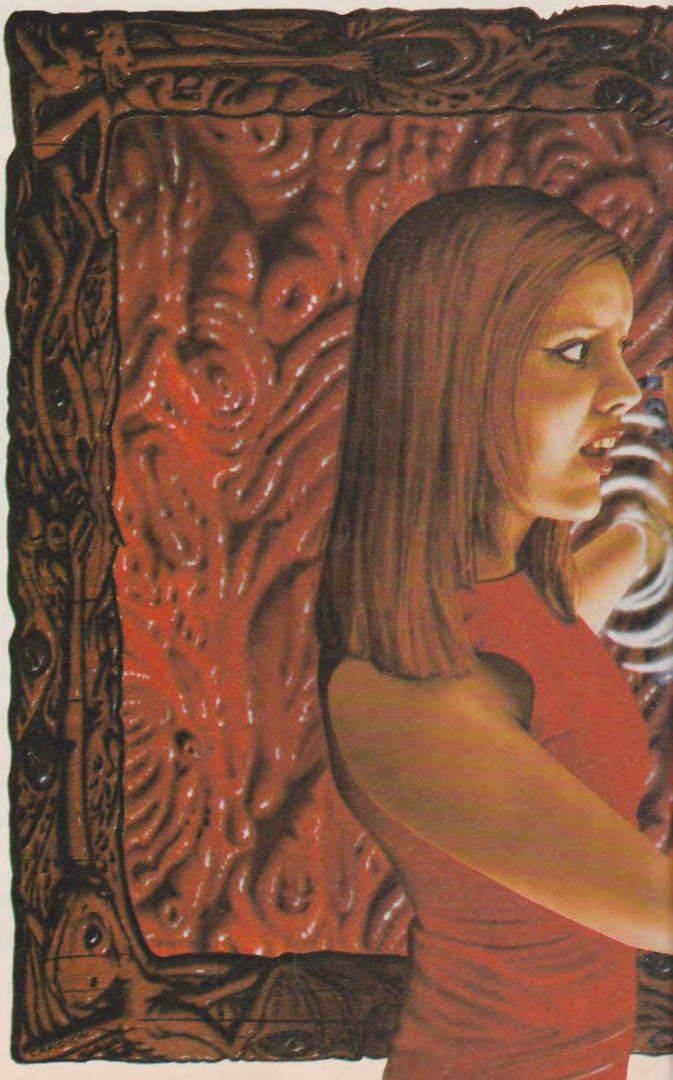
What if you could travel to p
the same Earth, only differ
has found the gateway



The translocator coils wind down from full power and you take a step across the lawn you've rematerialized on... What Earth is this, you wonder? Then suddenly, a familiar sight catches your eye – Tower Bridge in all its splendour. But what are those banners hanging over it? A crooked black cross set in a red circle? Just then a harsh voice cries out "Halt!" and you turn to face the approaching Gestapo officer. Behind him you spy a billboard that reads, "1941-1996: Das Neuer Englande Reich".

Parallel worlds and alternate histories have been a staple of science-fiction since the pulp novels of the Fifties. What-ifs and might-have-beens provide a dramatic background for heroes and adventurers travelling Earths alike yet different, with diversity enough in the concept to make it ripe for roleplay. Everyone has wondered what life would have been like if they'd made *that* choice instead of *this* one, and if the theory of an infinite universe is true, somewhere out there in hyperspace that other choice *was* made. An alternate Earth could be as subtly different as having you wear blue socks on Mondays instead of red ones, or as grossly divergent as being populated by intelligent lizards which have evolved from dinosaurs. In short, anything you can imagine could be just around the next wormhole.

"Bounced from Earth to Earth, your adventurers have little or no control."

Same planet, but a different dimension

But how exactly do you create a viable, realistic parallel world? First establish your criteria – are the changes subtle or gross? Imagine arriving on a world that looks just like home, but finding that the argument you had with your girlfriend last week wasn't resolved and she has consequently dumped you... How would you convince people that they were on another Earth if the only evidence you had was a dimly-remembered football score? Referees fond of paranoia could try this approach, slowly leaking out the fact that something wasn't quite right over time. But those after some pacey action could drop the players into a world where the Nazis won the Second World War, or where their peaceful homes were now in the middle of a vicious gang-ruled ghetto. Whatever mood you like to set in your games, you can carry it across into other Earths just as easily.

Alternate universes can generally be categorised in two ways: historical or physical. In the former a major event in the past took a different path from that of our world. Perhaps electricity was never invented, maybe John F Kennedy wasn't shot or Rome never fell. The event might also be a personal one to the players, such as a relative dying or your wife being married to someone else. Physical changes are a bit more involved, however. Here, something is sharply different about the universe as a whole. You could find an Earth populated by mute telepaths or covered with a nitrogen atmosphere instead of an oxygen one. Maybe it's a place where even the laws of physics might be severely off-kilter – gravity is a little stronger, say, or atom bonds are much weaker. By and large the historical universes are easier to create by simply finding an important event, changing it and then extrapolating how you think the ripple would spread out to influence the players here and now.

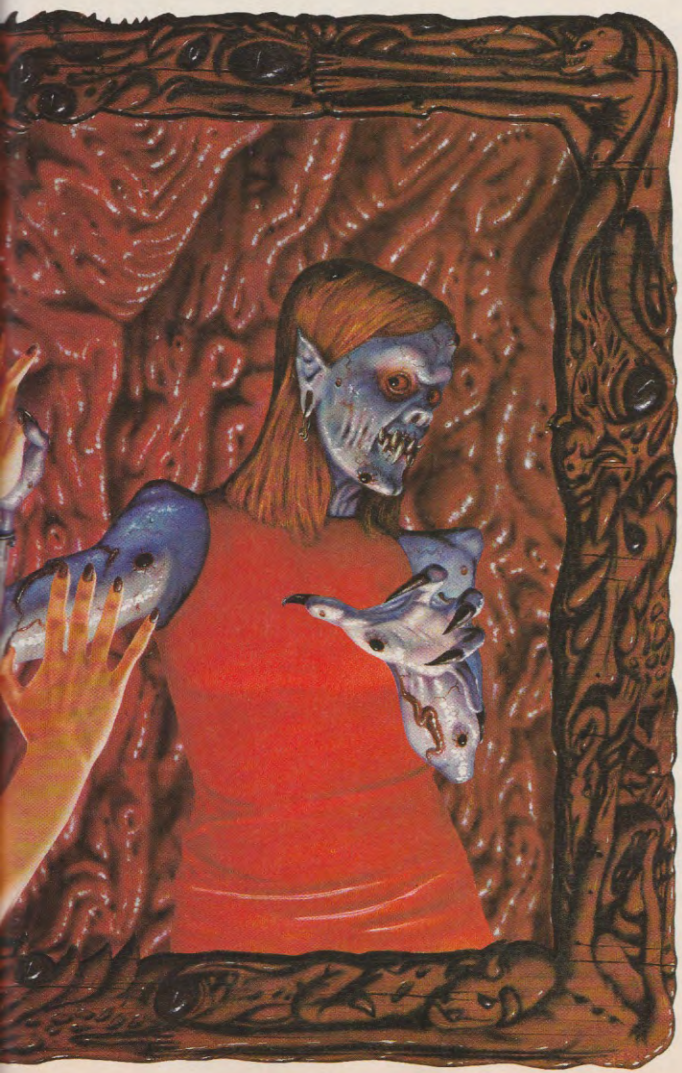
Home comforts?

To get the best response from your PCs it's a good idea to use the 'familiarity' effect. Encourage them to play themselves or characters like themselves, living in their own home town in their own country – that way, the changes encountered later will seem that much more immediate and disturbing. When H G Wells' *War of the Worlds* was published the readers were shocked because it took place in their England. Turning the real world on its head has the same disconcerting effect. How would *you* feel if you saw Russian tanks rolling down your local high street and red flags flying on the town hall?

Don't just confine your ideas for parallels to 'reality' or its variants. In an infinite universe anything is possible, so there may be worlds out there that look like the 1990s as depicted on the cover of *Amazing Stories*, or others in which characters from fiction or myth are real people. You can even land your players in the universe of their favourite TV series or book if the mood takes you (Robert Heinlein's novels *The Number of the Beast* and *The Cat who Walked through Walls* are

NITE THS

rallel worlds? The same year, t dimensions. Jim Swallow *to infinity and beyond.*



great examples of this concept). Roleplaying games that use generic rules systems are ideal for this.

From here to infinity

But how do you get there from here? Setting up a parallel worlds campaign should start with figuring out the mechanics of the travel between worlds. In a superhero game the players could fall victim to the plotting of a nefarious villain, trapped in some high-tech machine and shot into another dimension with no hope of return (DC Comics' *Elseworlds* and Marvel's *What If?* series are invaluable reading for this kind of set-up). Alternatively, in a present-day or near-future scenario the players might accidentally stumble on some top secret experiment, or even create the doorway between worlds themselves, like physics genius Quinn Mallory in the TV series *Sliders*.

In a high fantasy world, the tool of transfer could be a powerful spell, some eldritch artifact in a horror game, and in a space opera campaign it might be a starship's malfunctioning warp drive. **arcane's** Encounters have provided some perfect examples for interdimensional jump-off points, such as Mr Smith's Emporium (**arcane** 3), the city of Stormburg (**arcane** 4) and The Train (**arcane** 5). Ask yourself what the device is that enables the jump – is it a psi-power, a handheld timer or a blue police box? Story points for scenarios can come out of having the device lost, broken or stolen. If it's a magic spell, perhaps it only works in a certain place or at a certain time.

Maybe the eldritch artifact has to be stolen from a museum on each world. Giving the players the old ticking clock time limit until the next shift is another tried and tested way to induce tension. It is of course up to you to decide how important a role the 'tools' play in the game – and don't be afraid to use the 'magic box' technology if the players start asking awkward questions about exactly how the process works...

Eternal champions

Wanderers between worlds on a random course is the default setting for a campaign of this kind. Bounced from Earth to Earth, searching for the way back, your brave adventurers have little or no control over their destiny. Consequently, creating characters for a game of this sort is a problem. If the whole jaunt is some kind of accident, or some strange phenomena the PCs have stumbled upon, it's unlikely they'll have any training for this kind of thing – for the most part they will be ordinary folks. If the initial jump was a controlled experiment, you might find a mix of scientist types and military men (think of the characters sent through in the movie *Stargate).* While dramatic licence will certainly give you some kind of leeway ("How lucky! Bob just happens to be a Green Beret in his spare time."), there's only so far you can go without losing credibility.

An alternative idea is to set the campaign *in media res,* already on the move and populated by characters from several different parallels. While this allows the creation of some great backstory (players have to invent a basic world as well as a character), you lose a little of the familiarity effect somewhere along the way. And an important point about your character backgrounds: make them fairly in-depth, with notes on family, histories and so on. That way, the subtle and not so subtle changes on variant worlds will be that much more noticeable.

Of course, there's nothing to stop your PCs being able to travel to and from alternatives by choice, but the random setting is generally more fun. And you can always lull them into a false sense of security by telling them they're in control... at least to begin with.

"You find an Earth populated by mute telepaths or covered with nitrogen..."

All these worlds...

Multi-genre and generic gaming became fashionable a few years back, and now a fair crop of RPGs exist with ready-made mechanics for alternate world campaigns. Generic systems such as *GURPS, Amazing Engine, Hero System, Masterbook* and the new *Webs* have a fantastic framework and bolt-on universes, so PCs can switch between them with relative ease. On the other hand, games such as *Rifts, Torg, Dream Park* and *Morpheus* all use the idea of parallel realities as part of the gameworld's raison d'être.

RUBB
THE RU

Take a large number of interesting characters, throw them together and then see what happens – what you end up with is a freeform RPG. ***Andrew Rilstone*** *explains...*

What is a freeform?

If you have been to a convention in the last few years, you have probably got some idea of what a freeform is. It's one of those huge games involving people huddling in groups in the corridor outside the Gents saying, 'Is this the town square?' 'No this is the temple, the town square is by the coffee bar...'

So what is going on? A freeform is somewhere between a live action roleplaying game and a complex piece of improvised theatre. You have a large group of players, each of whom is given a character description by the referee. At the appointed time, they come together and, well, just hang around and roleplay for a few hours.

Why they are called 'freeform' games? We don't know. Their form is no more free than a simple RPG such as *Ghostbusters*. But given that everyone calls them freeforms, we will too.

The plot

Because a freeform is limited to a single room or a handful of rooms, continent-spanning quests are out. Intrigue, backstabbing and, above all, talking to the other PCs is the order of the day. If you think that this makes freeforms sound a little dry, you're wrong. In a freeform, you might find yourself playing:

- An undercover police officer, trying to find an escaped replicant in a sleazy bar full of bikers and drug dealers.
- Or the escaped replicant himself, trying to find the computer chip he needs to guarantee his freedom.
- A cool computer hacker, who can provide the replicant with the chip – at a price, of course.

classic freeform scenarios

DESTINATION HELL!

Setting: a run-down, broken wreck of a starship, limping its way through space with a cargo of prisoners. Criminal low-life who have received the ultimate sentence – life on the Hell planet of Proxima-Delta.

CHARACTERS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- **A brilliant computer scientist,** sentenced to exile for his all-too-human flaw of eating his research assistants' livers.
- **An idealistic student,** condemned as a traitor for speaking out against corruption back on Earth.
- **The corrupt captain** of the ship, who is planning to save money on this mission by dumping his cargo out of the airlock.

SNOWED INN!

On the great north road which links the Kingdom of the North with the Theocracy of the West is the Broken Staff Inn. The Inn is unusually full for the time of year, but a sudden, out-of-season snowstorm has blocked the road, and the visitors are trapped in the inn, perhaps for weeks.

NOTE: An interesting reversal is to set this scenario in the camp of the Dark Lord, giving players a chance to be goblins, trolls, evil knights and other bad guys.

CHARACTERS MIGHT INCLUDE:

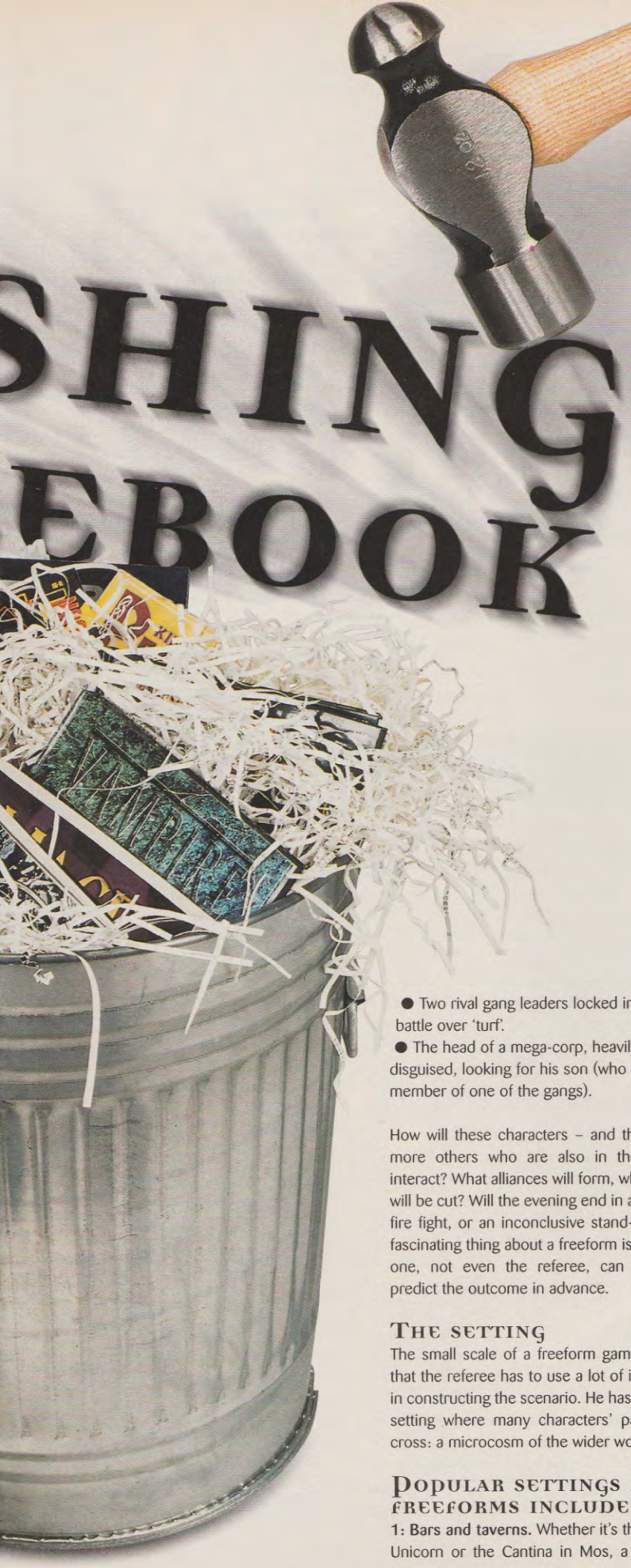
- **A pilgrim** who believes his soul will be forfeited if he does not read the Shrine of the Flaming Heart by the solstice.
- **A priest** from the Western Theocracy who is travelling north to whip up support for a crusade against all blasphemous worshippers of the Flaming Heart.
- **A sheriff** from the nearby town who thinks that a dangerous criminal may be hiding in the woods near the inn.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE BATTLE

Tomorrow at dawn, the forces of King Theron the good will face the massed armies of the Dark Lord in the final battle. This evening, the heroes and soldiers are in their tents and huddled around the campfire, nervously counting the hours before morning.

CHARACTERS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- **The leader of the mercenaries,** who is having second thoughts about facing such hopeless odds.
- **King Theron** himself, disguised as a common soldier, trying to find out what his men think of him.
- **An agent of the Dark Lord,** trying to sow dissent among the forces of goodness.



- Two rival gang leaders locked in a bitter battle over 'turf'.
- The head of a mega-corp, heavily disguised, looking for his son (who is a member of one of the gangs).

How will these characters – and the 20 or more others who are also in the bar – interact? What alliances will form, what deals will be cut? Will the evening end in a truce, a fire fight, or an inconclusive stand-off? The fascinating thing about a freeform is that no-one, not even the referee, can possibly predict the outcome in advance.

The setting

The small scale of a freeform game means that the referee has to use a lot of ingenuity in constructing the scenario. He has to find a setting where many characters' paths can cross: a microcosm of the wider world.

Popular settings for freeforms include:

1: Bars and taverns. Whether it's the Vulgar Unicorn or the Cantina in Mos, a drinking hole is a place where lots of characters can come together. Adventurers on quests, criminals on the run, local dignitaries – they all get thirsty.

2: Ships. Whether you are travelling from London to New York, or from Mars to Alpha Centauri, and whether it is a luxury cruiser or a tramp freighter, a ship is another popular setting. One great advantage is that the PCs can't decide to leave!

3: Meetings and Councils. The nobles of the kingdoms have gathered together to decide the succession… the powerful races of the galaxy are meeting on a neutral planet to formulate a peace treaty… the leaders of the Five Families have met up in an Italian restaurant to discuss The Business. Such themes are ideal if you enjoy games of negotiation and diplomacy.

What's the opposite of a live action game? I usually say round-a-table. Can anyone think of a better suggestion?

There have been a number of published books about freeforms, including: The Australian Games Group's excellent *Freeform Book*, White Wolf's *Minds Eye* Theatre series, and Chaosium's *Nexus*.

The characters

A round-a-table game can include Local Yokels and Faceless Stormtroopers, whose main purpose in life is to talk to the PCs or be shot at by them. But because there are no NPCs in a freeform game, such characters have to be made interesting in their own right, or else eliminated from the plot altogether. If the game is set on a spaceship, then all the crew members and passengers must be player characters, and if the spaceship is boarded by pirates, then the pirates are PCs too.

"Intrigue, backstabbing and talking to other PCs is the order of the day."

At its best, this means that freeforms are brilliant simulations of fantasy worlds, where even the most humble character has his own life. At its worst, it gives rise to hideously complicated plots, where the bartender turns out to be the half-brother of the commander of the Stormtroopers, but the Stormtrooper is in love with the bartender's daughter who is in turn in league with the rebels. Confused? Unpacking plots like this is half the fun of freeform games. Two things follow on from this:

First, freeforms need a lot of players. If you are going to construct a live-action fantasy tavern, you are going to need 20 or 30 people to make it seem crowded. Last summer the Convulsion 3D convention had as its centrepiece a freeform entitled *Home of the Bold*, which had over 100 players. Try fitting them around your dining room table.

Secondly, players in a freeform game don't get to generate their own characters.

The Centauri hate the Narn, the humans used to hate the Mimbari, the two casts of Mimbari hate each other and some of the goodies are secretly working for the baddies. *Babylon 5* is an ideal setting for a freeform. In fact, considering the standard of the acting, maybe it *is* a freeform.

The referee is more like the author of a play, creating descriptions of the main characters and then 'casting' players who he thinks would do a good job in the role. If the referee is any good, he ought to give players a written description of their characters some weeks before the game is due to start. Particularly kind ones get players to fill out a questionnaire about what sort of character they would like to play.

Do freeform games have any rules?

The most important rule of a freeform is, of course, to stay in character. From the moment you walk into the freeform room until the moment you leave, you have to play your character – do what he does, talk with his voice. That's the whole point of the game. But freeforms do not have rules in the sense of a RPG rules system – there are unlikely to be any attribute scores or skill ratings on your character sheet. The emphasis is much more on your character's personality than on his or her abilities.

Some freeforms have a simple rules system to cover matters such as magic, spying and assassinations. This will often take the form of a series of cards attached to your character sheet. An accomplished spy might be given three cards, each allowing him to eavesdrop on another character's conversation. At a crucial moment in the game, he will hand the card to the referee, and ask, 'What are those two characters talking about?' I think that this sort of thing spoils the realism of the game, but some referees think it worthwhile because it adds a level of complexity to the scenario.

What about combat?

Most freeforms ban combat altogether. It isn't really what the game is about. Sometimes, referees just make it a rule of playing that your character doesn't try to kill anyone. Others work the rule into the plot somehow – maybe there is a big Trollish bouncer who takes your weapon away when you arrive.

On the other hand, while freeforms are emphatically not excuses for bar-room brawls, it might be in the spirit of the two musketeers to drink too much wine and fight a duel, or for the drug-runner to resist when the undercover cop tries to arrest him. So some freeforms allow limited combat, either with LARP-style latex weapons, or with some other prop. (With a mature set of players, you can get away with saying, 'All fights must be in slow motion'.) Because this can be rather difficult to adjudicate, many freeforms say that players must use 'paper, scissors, stone' to resolve any fights.

What does the referee do?

Ideally, the referee does absolutely nothing. He or she has done all the work before the game starts. The ref just hands out the character sheets and watches the chaos start. Some referees take on a role in the game – the bartender or the ship's captain, for example.

In practice, however, most referees find plenty to do in the actual game. For instance, players will often need to ask referees questions about the background, or about one of the other characters. (For example, 'Does the guy with the black hood look anything like the wizard I remember meeting in the desert?')

In addition, many games rule that any fights or assassination attempts should be witnessed by the referee, to ensure fair play.

If a particular player is on the fringe of the game, the referee should try to pull him into the thick of the action by introducing him to another character, or maybe dropping some hint about what his or her PC could do next.

Freeforming for the future

One day, someone may truly invent a fully involving and convincing virtual reality. Until then, a good freeform – 40 or 50 people dressed in costume, roleplaying their hearts out, in a room which has been decked out to look like a spacecraft or a bar, or whatever – is about as close as I've come to feeling that I really *am* in a fantasy world, rather than just *imagining* it. People often wonder about the future of roleplaying games – but as far as I'm concerned, freeforming is it.

example character sheets

SETTING

The Golden Phoenix is the largest, most luxurious and most expensive passenger starship ever built. Only the extremely rich and the very powerful get to travel in its prestigious first-class section.

EXAMPLE CHARACTERS 1

His Holiness Augustus XVIII You are the supreme pontiff of the 1st Galactic Church of God. You are thought to have an impressive 78,000,000 followers dispersed among the various planets of the galaxy.

You are travelling with your usual retinue of cardinals and secretaries to the planet Baximillian in order to kiss the tarmac in the starport, make some speeches about universal love and holiness – all that sort of thing. Your holy position means that you can't make full use of the bar and the casino, although if you could just slip away from your retinue, you might have a go.

Although you are technically infallible, a few years ago you made a terrible mistake. The church needed a very large sum of money in order to establish a presence on the new TransGalactic VR entertainment network. A benefactor came forward with a large sum of money on condition that, at some time in the future, you did a service for him in return. You have since discovered that the benefactor was Travolt, and that the source of his wealth is the vile trade in Tetrahidron-B, one of the most addictive drugs known to man.

You are basically a good man, but you find it quite hard to be as good as everybody expects the Pope to be. Sometimes you are impatient and somewhat irritated with people who expect you to always kiss their babies, forgive their sins and so on.

EXAMPLE CHARACTERS 2

Travolt You are a prince of one of the five ruling clans of the planet Oasis. For over 1,000 years the clans have ruled the planet by controlling the supply of 'spice' – the Tetrahidron-B drug which practically the whole population is addicted to. You have expanded your spice trade off the planet and into the wider galaxy. Money, weapons and technology from off-world have poured into Oasis, making your clan pre-eminent.

Some time ago, you lent a huge sum of money to the 1st Galactic Church of God. Now, the time has come for the Pope to return the favour he owes you. You want him to declare that Tetrahidron-B is a wholesome substance, quite compatible with the church's teachings. This would force many planetary governments to legalise your product. If he is not prepared to do this you might reveal to the world that the church's media empire has been paid for with drugs money. you might demand the loan be repaid, or you might blackmail him with information about misbehaviour by one or two of his high-ranking cardinals.

You are, of course, travelling incognito. You spend most of your time in the ship's casino, so most people assume you are simply a successful gambler. You don't like being disguised as a commoner, but it is worth it for the huge amounts of resources that are pouring into Oasis.

OTHER CHARACTERS

1: The president of the TransGalactic VR Net – a sort of galactic Rupert Murdoch.

2: A famous rock star who wants to sign a contract with TransGalactic VR and who is secretly addicted to Tetrahidron-B.

3: A bounty hunter who has been given a tip-off that Travolt is travelling incognito on the Golden Phoenix.

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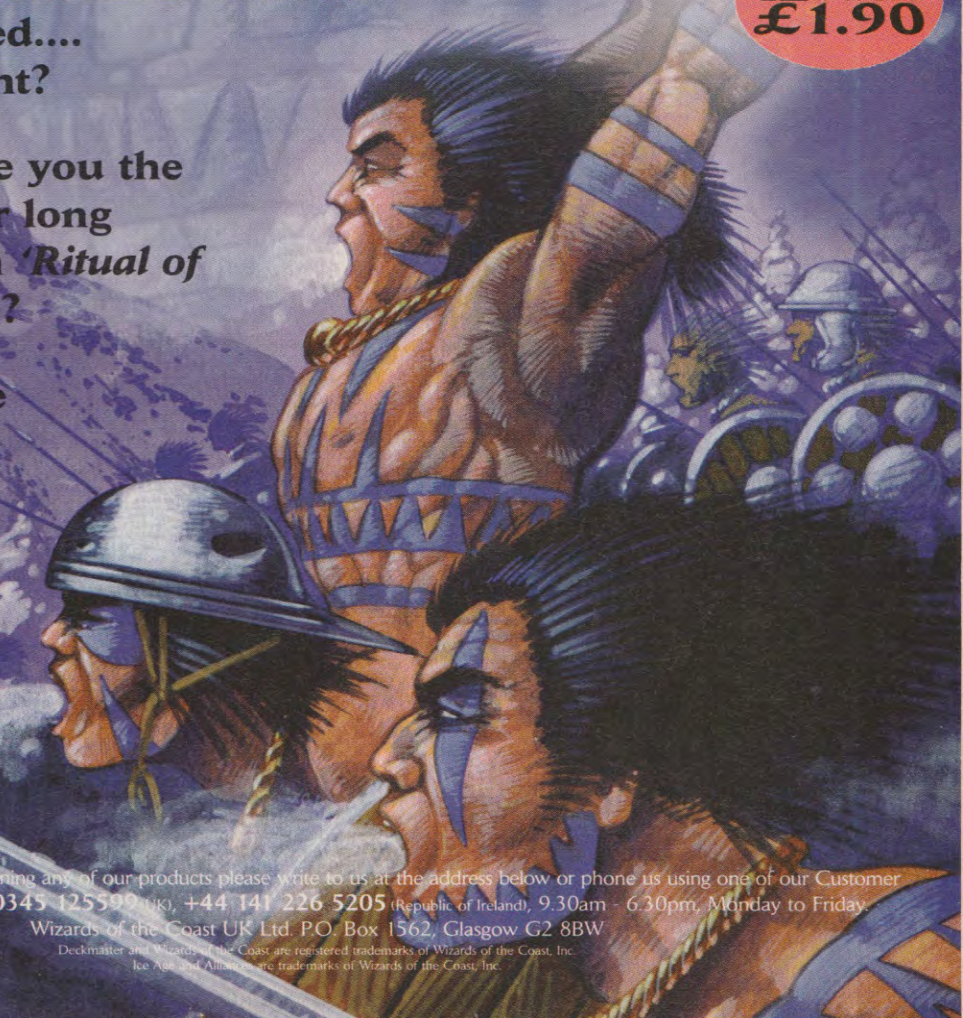

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SEPTEMBER ISSUE
OUT NOW

The Month In Games

Coming full circle...

IT'S STRANGE TO BE saying that the new game this month is a game which you are all more than likely familiar with, but it's true, because (as you may have noticed by now), the most important release is Marc Miller's *Traveller*. But we won't dwell on that too much – there are ten pages all about it elsewhere in the mag. Also well worthy of your attention are the reviews of *CyberStorm* (providing you've got access to a PC, of course), and *The London Guidebook* for *Call of Cthulhu*.

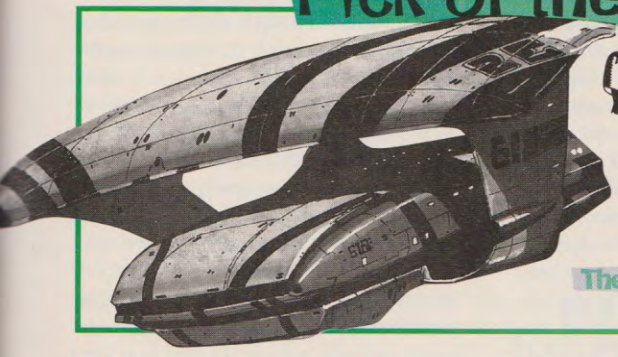
Don't let us keep you here, turn the page and immerse yourself in the month's reviews!

Our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all of the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. If it's praised in **arcane** you know you can buy it with confidence.

All our reviews are by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games that you do. This definitely is *the* place for definitive reviews of games and expansions.

A lot of the stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by various distributors, so the prices we give are guidelines only.

Pick of the month



"Traveller is a great game. it's back to stay."

Traveller Page 62

"Bringing the mythos about as close as is comfortable."

The London Guidebook Page 68

The Icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Roleplaying systems

Collectable card games and expansions

Board games, miniature systems

Dice games and expansions

Computer games and utilities

Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.

Score 9/10 Excellent, a classic. Highly recommended.

Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.

Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.

Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.

Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.

Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.

Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.

Score 2/10 Very poor, should be avoided.

Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

The index

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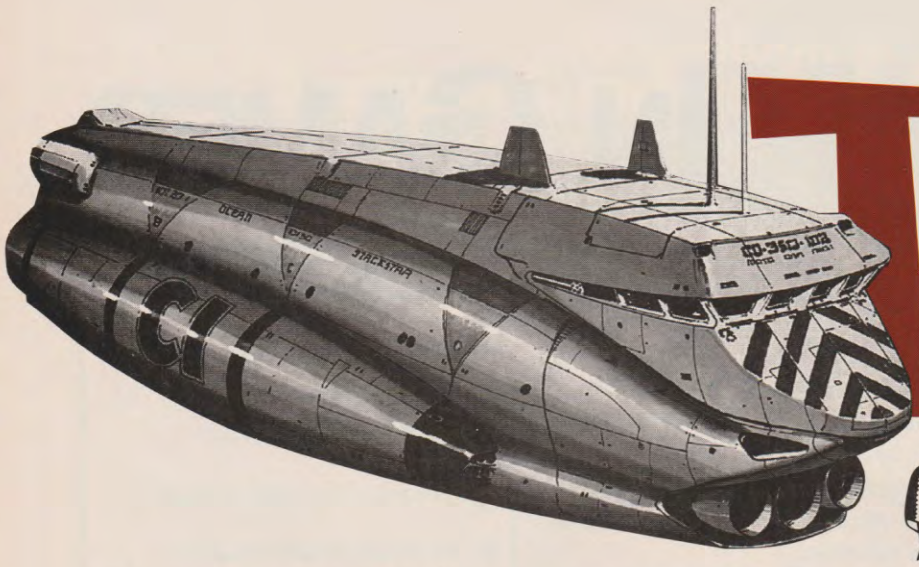


Trav

A roleplaying game £TBA Im

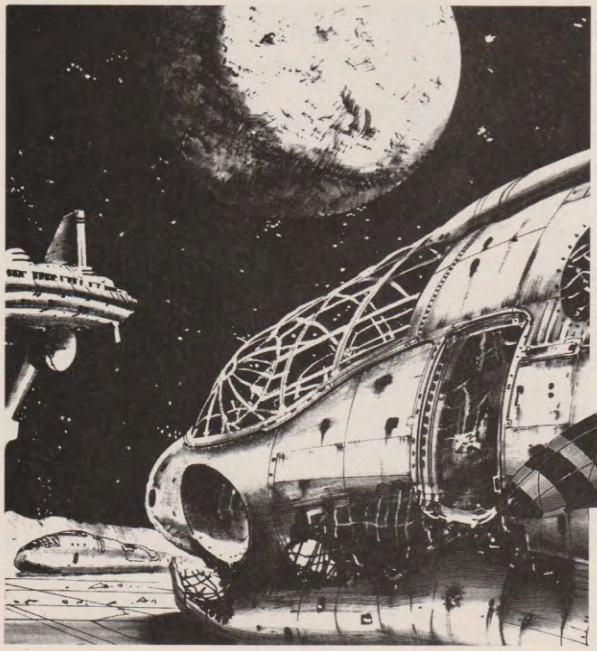
Imperium Games takes us back to the future...

To find out how this new version of *Traveller* came about, turn to 'From the Ashes' on page 24, where we talk to Marc Miller about the game's development.

Science fiction has always been a popular genre for roleplaying. For the past few years, though, it has been in steady decline, with cyberpunk games usurping traditional sci-fi's place. But now *Traveller*, the original science fiction system, is back.

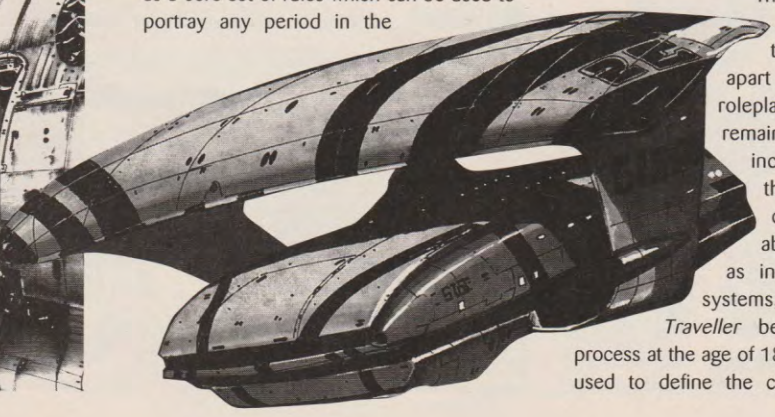
Traveller is set in the far future and portrays a universe of diverse cultures and interstellar civilisations, with a rich and detailed history. Each of the previous editions of the game has detailed a specific part of that history. *Classic Traveller* was set during the heyday of the Third Imperium, a vast human empire spanning thousands of star systems and dominating the known universe from 4521AD to 5637AD. *MegaTraveller* described the collapse of the Imperium into chaos, rebellion and civil war after the assassination of the Emperor.

"Gaming has been without a high-quality, strongly-supported hard science fiction game for too long, but there's no doubt that *Traveller* is back to stay."



Traveller: The New Era dealt with the struggle of a few small federations of worlds to build a new empire after the Imperium fell, and the fight against an artificially intelligent computer virus that was unleashed towards the end of the rebellion.

In contrast, the new edition of *Traveller* is not set at a specific time, but is intended as a core set of rules which can be used to portray any period in the game's history, from the distant past of the mysterious Ancients to the far, far future. Imperium Games intends to release a series of Milieu Books, each detailing a specific time in the *Traveller* universe, allowing referees and players a large choice of possible game styles. The first in the range, *Milieu 0*, will be released later this year and covers the beginnings of the Third Imperium. Although the rules in *Traveller* are generic and designed to be used with any of the Milieu Books, the specific technology included in the basic rules is designed for *Milieu 0*.



After a brief history of the various versions of *Traveller* (see 'From the Ashes', starting on page 24, for more details), and an introduction to the basic elements of the game, the book begins with the usual explanations of what a roleplaying game is, how to use the rules and so on.

Chapter two is where the rules proper begin, and deals with character generation. This has always been one of the areas that sets *Traveller* apart from other roleplaying games, and remains so in the new incarnation. Rather than defining the character's current abilities from scratch, as in most roleplaying systems, characters in *Traveller* begin the creation process at the age of 18, then the rules are used to define the character's previous

eller

um Games 001 414 275 3984 Out in August

experience – character generation in *Traveller* is almost a game in itself.

Beginning characters are initially defined by six characteristics – Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Intelligence, Education and Social Standing – which initially range from 2 to 12. The attributes are generated either by rolling two six-sided dice for each, rolling two dice six times and allocating the scores as the player desires, or rolling a single D6 12 times, pairing the results as desired and then assigning the totals. Although all of these methods include some degree of randomness, the last does allow players a fair amount of freedom to create the character they want.

Once the attributes have been generated, the character's life before the start of the game is detailed by a gradual process. Through this the character learns skills at different levels and may increase some attributes. Eventually, if the character ages sufficiently, some attributes may be appropriately reduced.

education which the character can attempt to attend. To gain entrance to a school or career, a character must meet certain minimum requirements and then take a test using two dice, modified by specific attributes (to enlist in the army, for example, the character must roll 9 or less, with a bonus for high dexterity and endurance).

Once in a career, the character serves in four-year periods known as 'terms'. In each term a character must roll to avoid being injured, may be promoted and learns from four to six skills (which can be chosen or rolled randomly). At the end of a term the character can attempt to continue in his or her current line of work, try to get a different job, or end character generation and start adventuring. At this point the character will gain a number of 'mustering out benefits', representing life savings, severance pay and useful equipment acquired throughout his or her career.

Character generation in *Traveller*, then, provides players with not only the game statistics for their characters, but also a fairly detailed background and personal history. The sense of depth that this gives even to newly-generated characters is one of the system's great strengths. It does mean that character generation is quite a detailed and involved process, but it's more than worth it.

Imperium Games already has an impressive line-up of supplements and sourcebooks planned for *Traveller*. Look out for previews and reviews in future issues of **arcane**.

The next chapter deals with the various skills *Traveller* characters can learn, nearly all of which will be familiar to players of earlier versions of the game. Each skill is described in detail, along with the attributes which affect its use. This leads rather nicely into chapter four, which deals with the core of the rules – the task system.

Tasks in *Traveller* are resolved by adding a skill to an attribute

"Even the design, which deliberately pays homage to the original style of *Classic Traveller*, is enough to spark a warm rush of recognition."

First the character's home world (the planet he or she grew up on) is either chosen by the ref or player, or generated randomly. The type of home world affects what careers are available, and grants certain skills (characters from an asteroid belt, for example, will know how to use a space suit). The 18 year-old character is also assumed to have learned some abilities already, and gains four skill levels which can be generated randomly or chosen from a selection of tables.

From this point on, the player chooses which career (or careers) the character follows. There are ten of these to choose from, plus a variety of schools of further

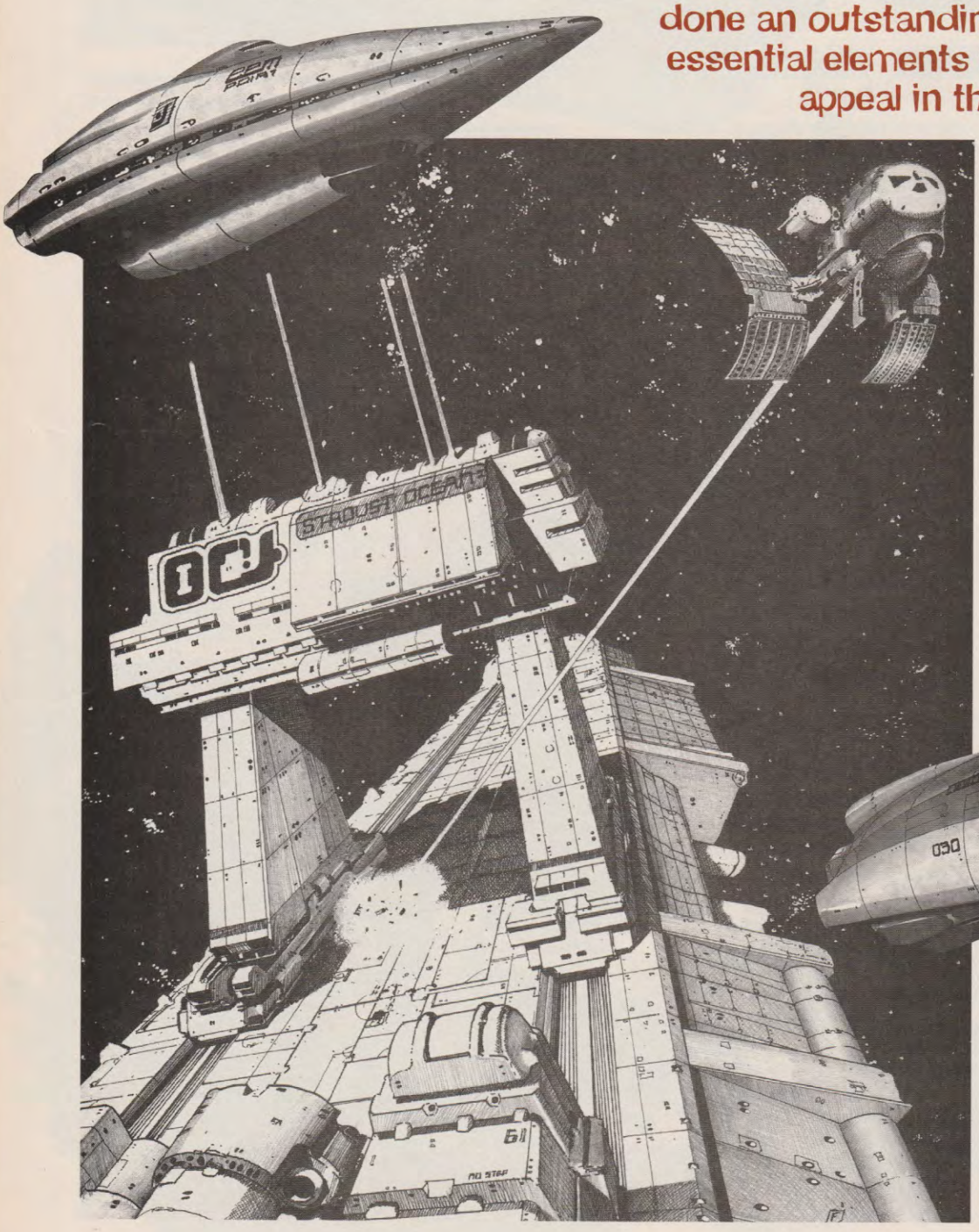
UK *Traveller* fans who want to get in touch with like-minded people can contact BITS – British Isle *Traveller* Support. See Despatches for details.

to generate a 'target number'. Depending on the difficulty of the task, as defined by the rules or decided by the ref, the player rolls a variable number of dice. If the total is less than or equal to the target number, the character succeeds. There are six standard difficulties – Easy, Average, Difficult, Formidable, Staggering and Impossible – each requiring more dice be rolled.

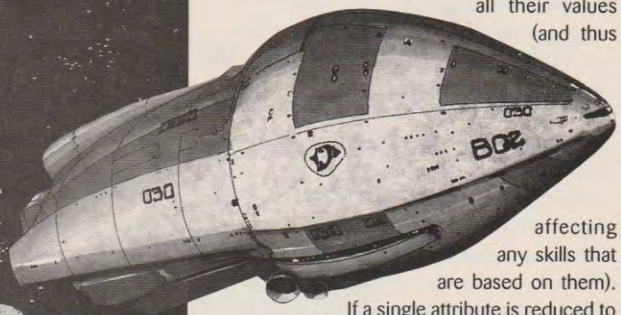
It's a simple system which is easy to understand, but it's not without its problems. The idea of rolling different numbers of dice depending on the difficulty is interesting, but the range of possible target numbers means that certain difficulties require halving one of the dice scores – a Difficult task means you have to roll two six-sided dice, and then roll another and half it. It's not a big problem, but it is a little clunky. Likewise, there's no way to determine the degree of success or failure, other than spectacular results (rolling the minimum possible is a success, rolling at least two sixes is a failure).

This system also represents probably the biggest change in the new edition of *Traveller* from *Classic Traveller* and *MegaTraveller,* where skills were far more important than attributes. *Traveller* reverses this – an average character has attributes of 7, and a 'professional' skill level is 3. Thus, the new system emphasises attributes to a greater extent than skills in determining success – experienced *Classic* and *MegaTraveller* players converting characters to this system will notice the difference.

"Marc Miller and Imperium Games have done an outstanding job at capturing the essential elements that gave *Traveller* its appeal in the first place."

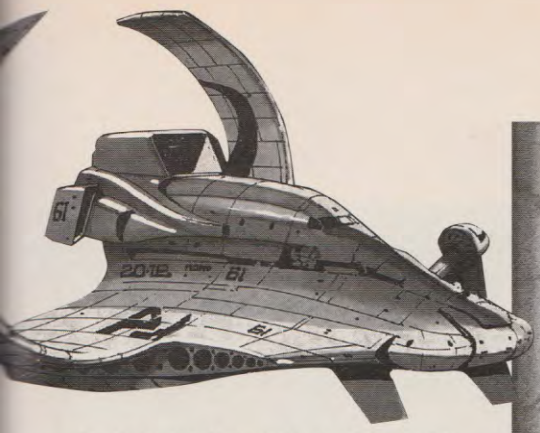


Having described the task system, the rules then move on to explain 'ground' combat (defined as just about any combat not involving spaceships). Fights are split into six-second rounds, in which characters move in reverse order of initiative and then perform actions in order of initiative, so that faster characters can react to the movement of others, but get to act first. Hitting an opponent requires a task check against the relevant weapons skill, with a difficulty determined by the specific situation. A successful hit inflicts damage dependent on the weapon, with armour absorbing a number of dice equal to its rating. Any remaining damage is applied, one dice at a time, to the character's physical attributes (strength, dexterity, endurance), reducing all their values (and thus affecting any skills that are based on them).



If a single attribute is reduced to 0, the character falls unconscious, if two are reduced to 0 the character is seriously wounded, and if all three fall to 0, the character is dead.

Like the task system on which it's based, the combat system is simple and fast moving, while proving deadly. Various optional rules are offered to add more realism, and the chapter suggests a number of techniques for adjudicating movement, varying from the abstract to the detailed.



And the players said...

PAUL: "A great start to the new *Traveller* – let's hope the supplements are every bit as good."

STEVE: "If, like me, you're an old *Traveller* fan, it's everything you could want."

EM: "A damn good game, but it feels just a little bit dated for my tastes."

From this point on, the bulk of the book's remaining chapters are taken up with background information. Equipment, vehicles, spacecraft (including a simple design system based on modular parts), space travel, space combat (again, a fairly abstract but easy-to-use system), trade, psionics (interestingly designed and far more flexible than in previous versions of the game), world generation and encounters (human, alien and animal) are all covered in a fair degree of depth. There are also two chapters of advice and pointers for referees, which are well written and useful for both experienced gamers and newcomers, and two adventures. The first of these, Exit Visa, is a curious little piece, in which the players must try to get permission to leave a planet. While it might make an interesting diversion for an existing group, it's not ideal for new players or groups. Rubicon Cross, the second adventure, is more promising. Although the details are sketchy, and a lot of decisions are left up to the referee, this could be used as an introductory adventure, and even as the start to a campaign.

In many ways, *Traveller* is trying to do two things at once. On the one hand it has to live up to the expectations of existing fans of the game, but Imperium Games obviously intends it to also appeal to new players who haven't come across *Traveller* before.

As an attempt to consolidate all of the strengths of the previous versions of the game into one system and form a solid backbone for expansion, *Traveller* is a success. It manages to pack a great deal of information into its 200 pages, and provides simple-to-use rules for every aspect of the game. If you're a fan of *Classic* or *MegaTraveller,* there's little doubt that you'll love it. Although there have been many changes, they take the form of refinements and revisions rather than massive alterations – this is still recognizable as *Traveller.* Even the design, which deliberately pays homage to the original style of *Classic Traveller,* is enough to spark a warm rush of recognition – you immediately feel right at home.

Traveller also has a lot to offer newcomers. For a start, the rules are easy to understand and clearly written, and the design is simple and clean, making it clear to read. Perhaps *Traveller's* biggest appeal, though, is the sheer scope it offers for almost any kind of science fiction gaming. *Traveller's* rules and background have always acted as a framework for the referee – rather than directing the game towards a specific style, they merely provide referees and players with the tools they need.

Unfortunately, while this freedom can be one of the game's great strengths, it can also be a bit overwhelming. *Traveller* does rely on the input of the referee and players to make it work, and some gamers might find it a bit directionless. To make matters worse, it doesn't include enough background information to start playing without a fair amount of work from the referee. The forthcoming Milieu books will almost certainly solve this problem, but it's worth bearing in mind if you're new to the game.

The only other aspect of *Traveller* that may cause problems is a matter of style. The original *Traveller* rules were deeply rooted in the hard science fiction of the late 1970s – Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein and their contemporaries – and the new edition retains this atmosphere. There has been a fair degree of subtle updating, bringing certain elements of the game and its background up to date with current expectations and current science fiction, but *Traveller* is still largely a game of classic sci-fi. As with the scope offered by the system, whether or not this strikes you as a problem is a matter of personal taste.

Even given these potential problems, though, *Traveller* is a great game. Marc Miller and Imperium Games have done an outstanding job at capturing the essential elements that gave *Traveller* its appeal in the first place. Gaming has been without a high-quality, strongly-supported hard science fiction game for too long, but there's no doubt that, on the strength of this, *Traveller* is back to stay.

Andy Butcher

Score 9/10

Gamers with access to the Internet should check out Imperium Games' World Wide Web site at: http://www.imperiumgames.com/

It's a dirty job, but...

Before starting their life of adventure, *Traveller* characters will normally have had at least one 'regular' job. There are ten of these to choose from:

Army: The future of *Traveller* is bright, but war is by no means a thing of the past. Army characters can become skilled in all aspects of ground combat.

Navy: The Navy is the mainstay of the Imperium's military might. Its starships protect its borders and its space-lanes. Naval characters can learn about operating starships and space combat.

Marines: Used in boarding actions, rapid strikes and in defence of Imperial bases, Marines learn how to fight in a wide variety of situations.

Scouts: The Imperial Scout Service has to take responsibility for the exploration of space and communications within the Imperium. A career in the Scouts teaches a variety of survival and exploration skills, as well as starship operation.

Merchant: Trade is the backbone of the Imperium. Merchants can work for a megacorporation or crew an independent ship, but all learn about starship operation, economics and so on.

Scholar: This covers everything from civilian doctors to research scientists.

Entertainer: Rock stars, actors, writers – many entertainers tour star systems, plying their trade.

Agent: Lawmen, intelligence operatives, bounty hunters, even investigative journalists.

Noble: The Imperium is ruled by nobles, who all report to the Emperor himself. Many younger aristocrats spend time travelling, though, and can learn a variety of skills, from fencing to diplomacy.

Rogue: Criminals pick up many useful (if illegal) skills, and normally learn how to protect themselves.

MissionForce: CyberStorm

A strategy game for the PC £44.99

Sierra 01734 303322 Out now

sierra brings the 'big robot' wargame to the pc...

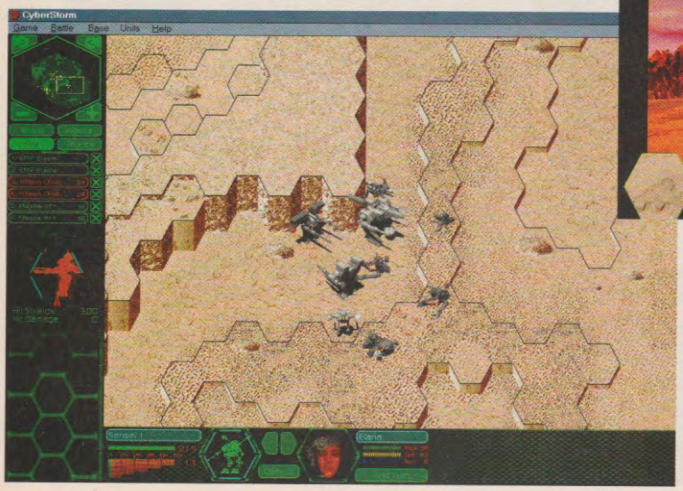
FASA recently teamed up with software developer Spectrum Holobyte to create an official *BattleTech* game, but no-one knows whether it's going to be strategic, like *CyberStorm*, or a 3D game like the other *EarthSiege* games and *MechWarrior 2* from Activision.

Robotic fighting machines varying in size from the merely large to the truly titanic have been a mainstay of Japanese Manga comics and animé for years. They've also proved popular among gamers, inspiring several successful roleplaying and wargame systems including FASA's *BattleTech* and *MechWarrior, Heavy Gear* from Dream Pod 9, and *Mekton Z* from R Talsorian. Only recently, though, have they begun to appear in computer games to any extent, and *MissionForce: CyberStorm* is the first PC strategy game based around them. *CyberStorm* is set in a near future where humanity has almost been destroyed by artificially intelligent fighting machines which it created (you'd have thought that the *Terminator* movies would have been enough warning, but those computer programmers never seem to learn). Having beaten off two major offensives, mankind is now expanding into space, beating back the remaining 'Cybrids' as it goes.

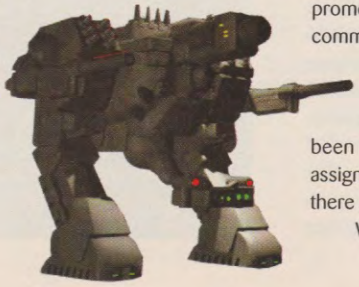
The game casts you as a new recruit in the military arm of the UniTech Megacorporation. The corp is attempting to expand its operations by gaining control of Cybrid occupied star systems, which is where you come in. You are given command of a unit of HERCs – massive robotic fighting machines which have proved the only match for the Cybrids – and must earn your keep by undertaking a variety of missions against the deadly AI forces.

"From start to finish it's highly polished and slick with top-notch presentation, excellent graphics and atmospheric sound."

MISSION BRIEFING
Star System: Ionis
Planet: Saiken
Mission type: Military
Objective: Defend installation
Mission length: 3 months
Flotation: None
Payment
Ore: Ore covers about 2% of the map
Cybrid bounty: 1000 credits per Cybrid
Bonus
Amount: 94966 credits
Goal: Defend our installation on Saiken for 14 turns
This area is infested with Cybrids
Cybrid forces have been massing near an important installation on Saiken. We need you to repel the impending attack. Your dropship will not be present so resupply will be

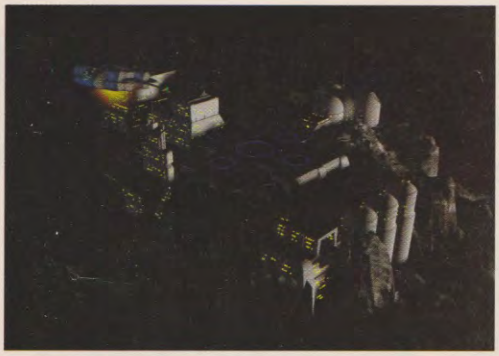


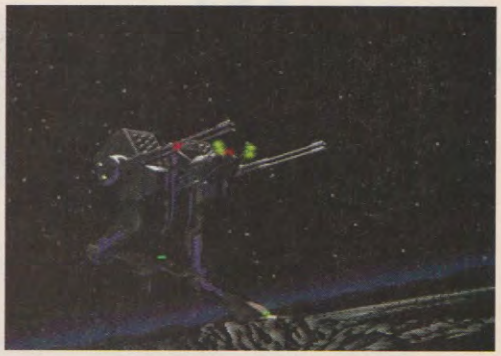
The overhead view is the one that you'll become most familiar with; it forms the bulk of the gameplay.



Your unit is semi-autonomous, and you are given a fairly free hand to decide on how best to use it (in corporate speak, you're an individual 'profit centre' within the company). At any given time the corporation's computers allot you a choice of eight missions. Each mission has a duration (from one to three months) and a preset bonus for success. The money you earn can then be used to repair and upgrade your HERCs. Some missions also earn you a promotion, which in turn allows you to command more HERCs, gives you access to better technology, and (of course) means you get offered tougher missions. Eventually, after having been promoted enough, you are re-assigned to a more dangerous star system – there are three in the game.

What makes things interesting is that





One of the best options within the game is the one which enables you to highlight areas of your HERC which are in danger of being crippled through further damage.

your HERCs are piloted by enhanced clones called bioderms – ordinary humans that are unable to cope with the stresses of HERC warfare. Unfortunately, bioderms are inherently unstable and have only limited lifetimes, which is where the length of the missions comes in. The more missions you undertake, the more experienced your bioderms become, but the older they get. You have to balance your need for money to upgrade your forces against the remaining lifespan of your 'derms – once one dies you can buy a new one, but it will lack experience, which in the later stages of the game can be critical.

All of this decision making is played out through a series of screens representing your base. The missions themselves are played out from an isometric command screen (see 'Battlefield anatomy' to the right). Combat is turn-based, and each of your HERCs is limited in its movement and actions every turn by its reactor and battery power. HERCs and Cybrids are protected from most damage by shields, so combat is a matter of knocking out the enemies' shields with energy weapons, and then blowing them to bits with missiles and cannons. Each mission takes place on a specific planet in the current star system, all of which feature different terrain, gravity and other environmental features that affect combat. Combine this with a combat system which takes into account limited sensor ranges, hidden terrain and units, indirect fire and a whole range of other factors, and you have an impressive game.

In fact, impressive is a good word to describe *MissionForce: CyberStorm*. From start to finish it's highly polished and slick with top-notch presentation, excellent graphics and atmospheric sound. The animation is of excellent quality throughout, especially in the combat sections, where your HERCs stomp about in a convincing manner.

Likewise, the missions are challenging and engaging, the management side of the game is well thought out and allows for a number of different strategies, and the sheer variety of HERCs, weapon systems and upgrades is more than enough to keep you coming back for more. Best of all, there's a multi-player option which enables you to battle against your friends.

The only thing that lets *CyberStorm* down is the lack of variation in the types of mission you are offered in the single-player game – they all fall into about half-a-dozen categories. The number of planets, each with their unique environments, does go some way towards solving this, though.

Despite this, *CyberStorm* is excellent, and will be a tough act to follow for any other strategy-based 'big robot' game. Fans of *BattleTech, Heavy Gear* and *Mekton Z* will find lots to enjoy here, as will anyone with a PC and an interest in strategy or wargames.

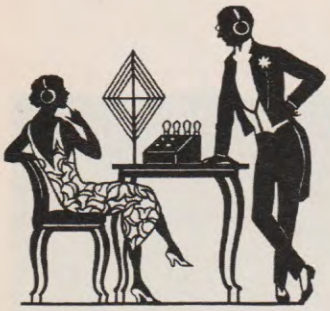
Andy Butcher

While *CyberStorm* concentrates on strategy and tactics, the first two games in the series – *EarthSiege* and *EarthSiege 2* – were 3D combat 'simulations' which put you in the cockpit of a HERC.

Score 8/10

Battlefield anatomy

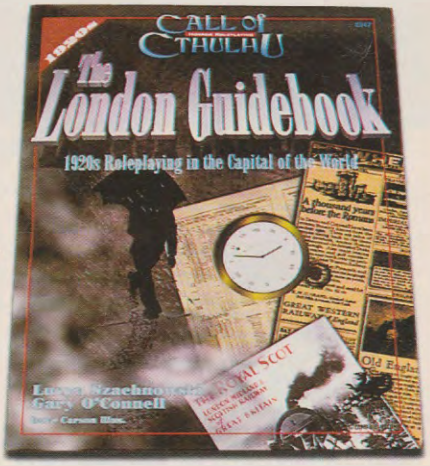
This map shows the entire battlefield.
The selected HERC is firing – this is a list of its weapons.
This display shows the shield and damage status of the target.
A Cybrid suffers from a direct missile hit.
The terrain affects targeting and movement. You can rotate the map for a better point of view, and zoom in and out to show more or less detail.
The remaining reactor and battery power of your HERC is displayed here.
These displays show the status of the current HERC and its pilot.



The London

A sourcebook for *Call of Cthulhu* **£9.95** **Chaosium**

001 510 547 7681 **Out now**

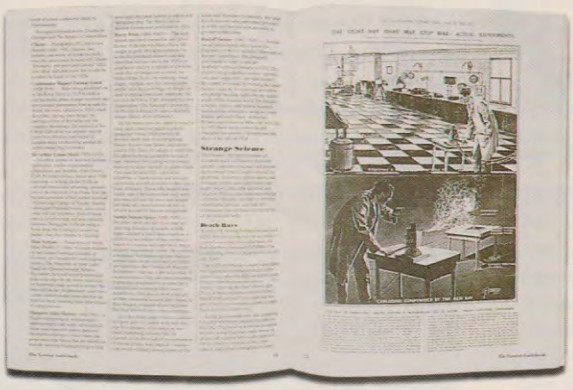


cthulhu's coming home for a foray in London. can you keep possession of your sanity long enough to deal with him?

Some of the most memorable *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios I've ever been involved in have been based in the UK, rather than in the States. The immediacy of a British setting makes the loathsome goings-on of Cthulhu's minions that much more involving, as does reference to places that players are more likely to have visited rather than merely heard about. What's more, by basing scenarios in the British Isles you can do away with all of those dodgy fake American accents and copious references to American icons. By bringing the mythos home, you bring it about as close as is comfortable.

The release of *The London Guidebook* is, then, a welcome addition to the line of *CoC* supplements currently available. Reminiscent of the *Green and Pleasant Land* sourcebook by Games Workshop released back in the mid 1980s, this is basically a gazetteer of London as it was in the 1920s, embellished with suitable occultist information and a regrettably brief scenario (yes, there's just one scenario, and it only stretches to four pages of text – three or four scenarios, each of 10-15 pages would have been far more valuable).

Anyhow, down to some important specifics… After a series of pieces on the effects of the First World War on our nation's capital, and some detailed information on what life was like in London for the various classes, the sourcebook settles into what makes up the majority of its 96 pages: a listing of the many London districts with accompanying information on what each district contained of interest to referees (including important museums and art galleries, parks and zoos, bars, clubs and similar establishments). This information is well presented, and there's a definite feel to the text that suggests the authors have gone out of their way to describe locations in such a way that those places could easily be used with *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios. For example, when describing Chislehurst Caves, the authors have made a point of suggesting that there is a whole set of lower caves beneath the first with a forgotten entrance, and no-one actually knows what is down there. Scenario ideas immediately spring to mind, as indeed they should.



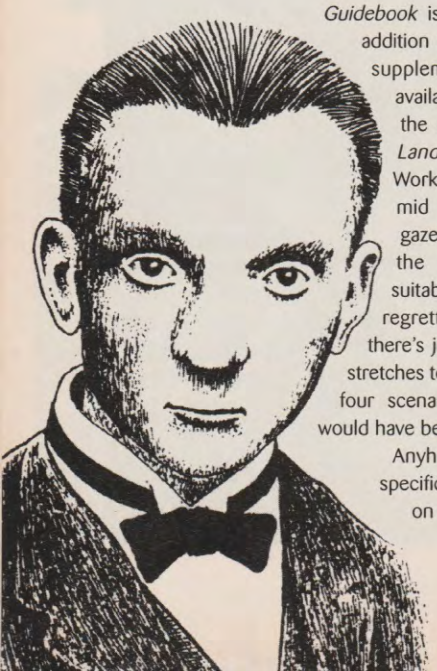
Many of the areas covered here are accompanied with period-style maps, which should prove invaluable, especially in investigative scenarios where the movement of the PCs has to be tracked closely. Also, the book is scattered with period photography, some of which is highly evocative, with a brooding, malevolent atmosphere (which has much more to do with the slightly misty, faded nature of old photographs than anything else). Spot illustrations (both period and contemporary) are also used here to good effect, maintaining the typically high standard we've come to expect in Chaosium's range of roleplaying books and supplements.

"The immediacy of a British setting makes the loathsome goings-on of Cthulhu's minions that much more involving."

So, this is a cracking sourcebook, and it gets better… For after the location guide it moves rapidly on to describing social and political institutions – how they work, what kind of a job they made of their work and how they could and should be used by *Call of Cthulhu* referees.

Transport, which was a severe problem at a time when the number of cars in Britain

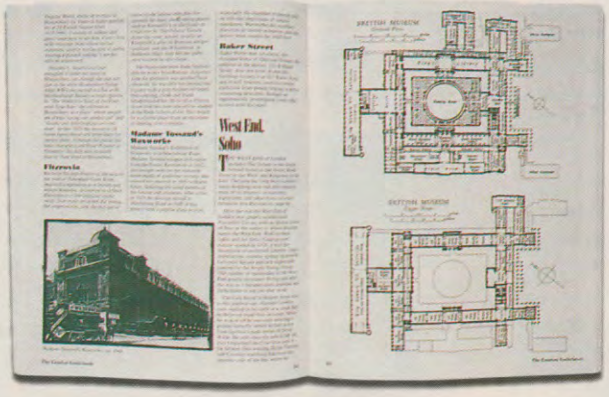
Referees who are serious about running *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns in Britain should make every effort to get hold of a now sadly out of print supplement by the name of *Green and Pleasant Land*. It was originally published by Games Workshop in the mid to late eighties for £4.95. Look out for it in your local second-hand games store.



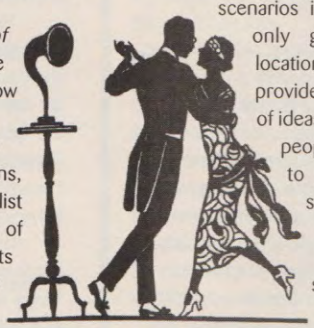
Guidebook

was rapidly approaching a million, and roads, which were still only really suitable for horse and cart, get a good couple of pages which is essential – it's all too easy when playing *CoC* to forget just how much of a problem transportation was in the 1920s, especially in a major city.

Inevitably, law and order gets the full treatment – again, this is something that most players are going to experience first hand, so it needs as much detail as possible. And again, *The London Guidebook* comes up trumps, because it not only follows through arrests from the street, through the courts and into the cells, but it also lists a page-worth of true crimes from the period. These could easily be incorporated into scenarios, with the players stumbling across or maybe even causing some of these famous crimes to have occurred in the first place. It's this kind of extra effort and level of detail which makes the difference between a sourcebook being merely useful and intrinsically inspiring.



Of course, no *Call of Cthulhu* guidebook would be complete without a section on how the occult operated in any given area. Here we have details of occultist clubs and organisations, together with a look at specialist museums and, of course, some of London's most famous cultists from the era (including Aleister Crowley, who is explained in more detail in *The Golden Dawn,* a sourcebook for *Call of Cthulhu* which was reviewed in **arcane** 8).



With all of this and indeed a great deal more besides, *The London Guidebook* is absolutely essential for any referee who intends to run a campaign or a number of scenarios in 1920s London. It not only gives the all-important locational information, but also provides the referee with dozens of ideas as to how the places and people described can be used to good effect in various scenarios. If only it included another 60 pages or so made up of sample scenarios…

Paul Pettengale

Also within the pages of *The London Guidebook* is a timeline covering events within the city between 1920 and 1929. There's also a chronology of London starting in 4000BC. Apparently, 80 percent of London was burned to the ground during the Great Fire of 1666. Fascinating stuff.

If you live in London, why not have a scenario based in your neighbours' house, at it was in 1920? That would be sure to freak your players out – let them slowly discover the location of a series of murders, with all the clues leading to a particularly familiar address. Hmm, maybe not such a good idea...

Don't take drugs

That's the motto for the one, short scenario to be found at the back of *The London Guidebook,* because if you partake in a heady mix of cocaine and champagne then you could end up like Agetha Simms, a friend of the investigators who took an extended float in the Thames after a night on the town. Vile Bodies, which is based on the Evelyn Waugh novel of the same name, has the investigators attempting to solve the riddle behind the death of their indulgent compatriot, leading them deeper and deeper into a sordid tale of the darker side to social London.

It's a good scenario, that much is for sure, but I can't help but think that more could have been made of it – it's very quick to complete, and requires a fair bit of work on the behalf of the referee. And sorry to bang on like a chimp with a drum, but one scenario simply isn't enough. To suitably illustrate the kind of scenarios that can be run in a London setting, there should have been at least three. If there was, then this supplement would have been superb value for money. As it stands, it's just good.

Score 8/10

Field Manual: Draconis Combine

A sourcebook for *BattleTech* and *MechWarrior* **£11.99** **FASA**

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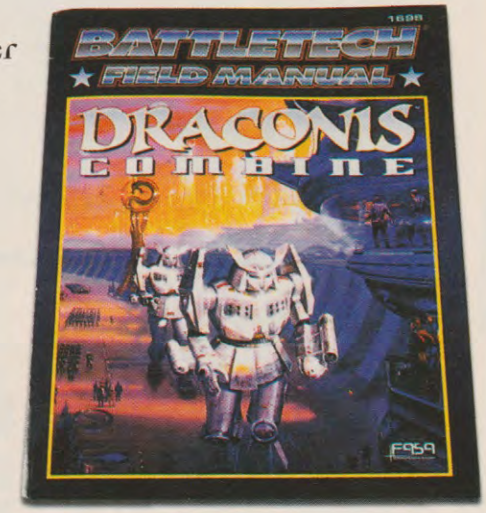
Take a guided tour of one of Inner Sphere's most powerful Houses...



New for the ever-growing *BattleTech* range comes *Field Manual: Draconis Combine*, a 176-page sourcebook detailing the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery (DCMS), the fighting force of House Kurita. The DCMS stands out from the armed forces of the other Successor States mainly due to the observance of the code of Bushido – the code of the ancient samurai who are the cultural ancestors of the Kuritan people. Honour and face are all important to the soldiery of the Draconis Combine.

The *Field Manual* begins by explaining the role of the military as the central of the Five Pillars which maintain the Draconis Combine. The relationship between the soldiers and the code of Bushido is discussed, as is its re-structuring over the last 100 years to allow for the changing face of war in the Inner Sphere. Also including details of the DCMS chain of command, this chapter provides an overview of the organisation, revealing the idiosyncrasies which characterise the DCMS.

Next, the manual details the assets and organisation of the different arms of the DCMS, including the *BattleMech* regiments, Aerospace, Ground Infantry and Armour. Information is provided relating to uniforms, ranks and decorations, so any Kuritan character is sure to be impeccably dressed at all times. Plus, any character will have a career history, thanks to the inclusion of a detailed study of the various training academies and military schools operated by the DCMS, with rules covering training packages provided later in the manual.

A number of new types of BattleMech appear, along with new pieces of equipment, Battle Armour and even a number of warships, operated by the Aerospace division of the DCMS. As usual, these are all supported by full record sheets and background information.

The bulk of the manual, though, is the database containing details of most of the primary regiments within the DCMS, ranging from the elite Swords of Light units, through the District regular units, and on to the specialist regiments, such as the Sun Zhang units. Also detailed are the deadly Ghost regiments, raised by Theodore Kurita from the ranks of the shadowy Yakuza gangs, so widespread in the Combine. Each unit is given a brief history and a breakdown of its unit strength. An excellent inclusion here is the unit insignia which each bears, helping to further enhance the individuality of the regiments.

Complete with eight pages of colour artwork, *Draconis Combine* is another excellent release for a game which continues to grow in both strength and depth.

Alex Bund

Score 9/10

Undermountain: The Lost Level

An adventure for *AD&D*

£4.99 **TSR** **01223 212517** **Out now**

When I was a young lad all this was dungeons, you know. There was none of this wilderness nonsense, cities were places where you kipped and the outer planes the stuff of madmen's dreams. Dungeons were where monsters lived in single rooms, puzzles had obscure solutions but obvious benefits, and treasure was enough of a lure to drag even paladins to their doom.

AD&D has become a far more subtle and complex beast since those heady hacking days. Indeed the 'straight hack' is an endangered if not extinct species. The *Dungeon Crawl* series, of which the *Undermountain* is the first example, aims to revive this straightforward, no-nonsense formula. And it does a fine job.

Set in the *Forgotten Realms* Undermountain, although the location's not important, this is a high-risk, high-reward enterprise. Characters are dumped in the dungeon at Room 1 and the only way out is in Room 30. It's as simple as that.

The Lost Level ignores the beguiling extras that strangle so many campaigns and lets heroes do what heroes do best – act under pressure. And they'd better do the right thing at the right moment, because this dungeon's primed to chew up characters and spit their still smoking bones at the player's feet.

The obvious threat is supplied by a horde of monsters that haven't been fought for years – Carrion Crawler, anybody? – but they're mere sleight of hand to distract players from the true threat, a caped figure lurking in the shadows. Together these simple elements create a chilling little challenge.

The *Dungeon Crawl* concept works. Junking a lot of modern day *D&D* distractions, this a refreshing return to old-style adventuring – and prices!

Trenton Webb **Score 9/10**

The Art of Playing *Mythos*: A Tome of Arcane Knowledge

A player's guide for *Mythos*

£TBA **Chaosium** **001 510 547 7681**

Out in August

The large majority of any player's guide for a CCG should, I firmly believe, consist of tips on how to play the game and win, rather than long card lists and a

reiteration of the rules. *The Art of Playing Mythos* is part-way there – it kicks off with the rules of the game (which are, unfortunately, almost entirely unchanged from the version of the rules which comes with each starter pack. Some of the more confusing paragraphs have been clarified, but other than that, the text is identical), but then rapidly moves on to deck construction and some general information about how to make your *Mythos* deck reflect the storytelling nature of the game.

Yes, there is a card list, and a somewhat curious section (which runs to a mammoth 60-odd pages) which gives you some background information on selected cards from the entire set, but the most interesting sections are those which deal with tips and tactics for playing the game. It's a shame that this only runs to some 20 or so pages.

Those confused by the rules for *Mythos* are certainly going to find this tome useful – there is a FAQ section which clarifies many of the rules, and there are a number of sample combats which make that area of the game perfectly clear. Those of you who want background detail on individuals are also going to be pleased, though – there's more than enough of that – but I can't help feeling that the tactics section could and should have been beefed up from 20 to around 70 pages, and the peripheral information minimised to add worth to the book for seasoned *Mythos* players.

Paul Pettengale **Score 5/10**

Shadows of the Underworld

A collection of adventures for *Shadowrun*

£8.99 FASA 001 312 243 5660

Out now

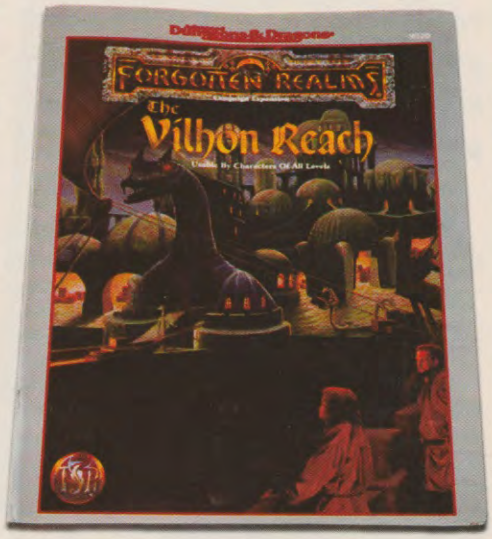
Following on from the events of the *Super Tuesday* book, which introduced the run-up to the American elections of 2057 (**arcane** 7), comes another collection of five short adventures for *Shadowrun*. As the campaign has continued it's begun to affect more and more aspects of everyday life in the United Canadian and American States – and with six major candidates jockeying for position, the shadows have come alive.

As with *Super Tuesday*, each of the adventures in *Shadows of the Underworld* entangles the players in the nefarious schemes and plots of one or more of the major presidential candidates. With the election drawing closer, though, the →

The Vilhon Reach

A *Forgotten Realms* campaign expansion for *AD&D*

£9.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now



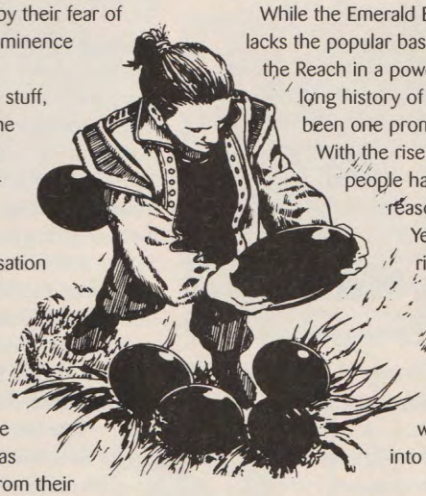
Try to imagine a sort of Beruity, Bosnian, CIS kind of place...

A study of the *The Vilhon Reach* should be dull. It's too civilised, too central and too focused on trade to be any fun. Yet this latest *Forgotten Realms* campaign expansion takes tedious trading towns and develops them into a network of delightfully jealous city states teetering on the brink of war.

The Vilhon Reach has a distinct Eastern European flavour with established nations rubbing shoulders uncomfortably with newly-formed city states. Only mercenary armies and unreliable alliances hold the peace. In a Soviet fashion, Chondath is a belittled ex-empire humbled by its own experiments with magic of mass destruction and expansionist greed. Now the satellite states that were once united by their fear of Chondath are nervously vying for prominence during its decline.

While this is good, if predictable stuff, what sets *The Vilhon Reach* apart is the Emerald Enclave. This loose group of druids, clerics, bards and sundry eco-aware classes exerts vast regional influence. The 'cult' first came to prominence as an anti-logging organisation and had the nerve and the power to tell monarchs to stop felling or else. And this 'or else' was backed by some pretty potent earth magic.

These eco-terrorists are the wild card in the Reach, supplanting the Harpers, Zhentarim and Red Wizards as the primary focus of hidden power. From their magic-proof citadel, the Enclave vets everything from monumental magic through to industrial pollution – and woe betide anyone stupid enough to ignore a direct warning to stop.



While the Emerald Enclave currently holds sway it lacks the popular base to run the region – leaving the Reach in a power vacuum. Throughout the long history of the Reach there has always been one prominent if not dominant power. With the rise and fall of each empire, the people have developed a whole host of reasons to rabidly hate each other. Yet in this power vacuum old rivalries and new jealousies have turned the Reach into a powder keg that's ready to blow. Each country is rife with plots, and the success of any single one of them will drag the entire region down into civil war.

And this war, when (not if) it comes, will be vicious indeed. For each of the major nations and cities are ruled by formidable heroes the like of 30th level druids, 15th level fighters and 22nd level mages. So you know for sure that any fight will be full-on and fatal.

The Reach welcomes adventurers. Each army needs specialists, each town needs problems solved and there's treasure aplenty washing around the many ruined cities. But those who take on these challenges risk becoming embroiled in a truly titanic power struggle. Now that's a shame.

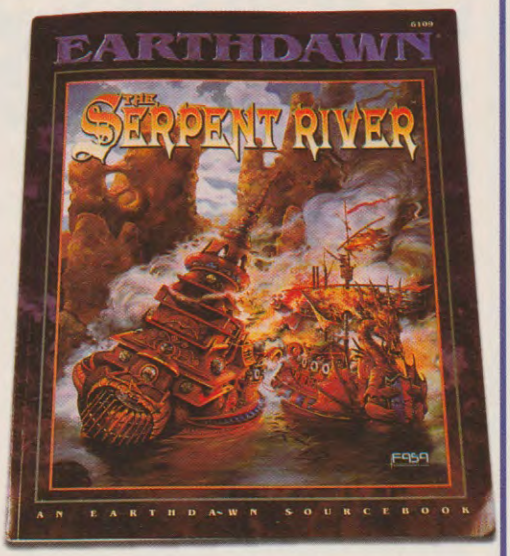
Trenton Webb

Score 8/10

The Serpent River

A sourcebook for *Earthdawn* **£10.99** **FASA** **001 312 243 5660** **Out now**

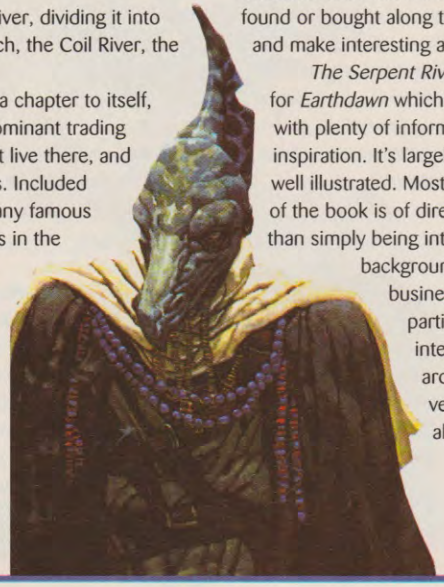
Travel and trade, politics and power — the Serpent River's got it all.



Well over 2,000 miles long, the Serpent River is the lifeblood of Barsaive, the setting for *Earthdawn*, FASA's fantasy roleplaying system. *The Serpent River* is a sourcebook for the game which details every aspect of life on and around this vast waterway, concentrating on the t'skrang trading houses which dominate its trade and politics. If you thought that rivers were only useful for getting your adventurers from one place to another, you should think again – this book contains more than enough information to set an entire campaign along its varied course.

The Serpent River begins with an introduction which discusses the river as a whole, its importance as the main trade route for all of Barsaive, and a brief look at each of the major trading houses. The book then takes a more detailed look at the river, dividing it into four main sections: the South Reach, the Coil River, the Mid Reach and the North Reach.

Each section of the river has a chapter to itself, which takes a closer look at the dominant trading houses of the area, the people that live there, and any notable settlements and towns. Included are statistics and descriptions for any famous or powerful characters who players in the area might meet, notes of local legends and myths, and a host of other small details which help bring the river and its customs to life. The interactions between the various houses and surrounding governments are particularly interesting, and any referee thinking about introducing a little more scheming and politics to his or her campaign will undoubtedly find a lot to work with here. There's also plenty of inspiration provided for those more interested in traditional adventuring.



The last three chapters are dedicated to game statistics and new mechanics which a referee using the book will need. The first includes descriptions of all the types of vessels commonly used on the river, together with rules for ship-to-ship combat. The system presented fits in well with the standard rules, and manages to cover all the major aspects of naval battles without getting bogged down in details. Next come statistics for over 20 new creatures which players may encounter along the Serpent, including several species of interesting plant life. Finally, the book ends with a selection of treasure and magical items which may be found or bought along the river. All are well-balanced, and make interesting additions to the game.

The Serpent River is a good, solid sourcebook for *Earthdawn* which is packed from cover to cover with plenty of information, bright ideas and inspiration. It's largely well written, easy to read and well illustrated. Most importantly, the great majority of the book is of direct use to the referee, rather than simply being interesting fluff to pad out the background of the game. Referees with business-minded players will find it of particular use, because an interesting campaign could be built around an independent merchant vessel which is plying its trade along the river.

Andy Butcher

Score 8/10

→ stakes are getting higher, and it won't take much for the streets to erupt in chaos. The adventures included here are, for the most part, tougher and more dangerous to boot.

Also like *Super Tuesday*, *Shadows of the Underworld* is impressive in its variety. Although relying more on the traditional 'Mr Johnson hires you to do X' format, the plot twists are just as imaginative, and none of the adventures lapse into clichés or obvious endings.

So, yet another impressive selection of short adventures from FASA. Unfortunately, though, there are two drawbacks to *Shadows of the Underworld*. For a start it's not going to be a lot of use unless you're including the election in your campaign – it would be hard work to alter most of the adventures to work without their political background. Perhaps, more importantly, they're set in a variety of locations, including New York and California, as well as trusty Seattle. Once again, you could alter them to fit elsewhere, but not without some work.

Andy Butcher **Score 6/10**

Live & Direct: Multimedia in the Cyberpunk Age

A sourcebook for *Cyberpunk 2020*
£6.99 **R Talsorian Games**
001 510 549 1373 **Out now**

Listen up! There's something new going down. From the corporate towers of Network 54 and DMS, to the news-choppers screaming over the capitals of the world, the *Live & Direct* sourcebook opens up the realm of the media in *Cyberpunk 2020*.

This 96-page supplement contains everything you need to expand the world of the Media character. Beginning with a brief explanation of the history of the media from the dark days of the 20th century, it goes through the collapse of the United States, to the corporate media giants of the 21st century. This, plus an overview of the tools of the media, such as the screamsheet and braindance, provide a complete picture of cyber-media.

New role templates based on the original Media are provided, such as the adrenaline-junky war correspondent, or the moral crusader, along with rules regarding composing stories and media support.

The book is completed with an overview of the world of the Media, with details of the major corporations and other pertinent information provided for the referee. This, plus a discussion of the role

of the media in campaigns, both as good and bad guys, gives the referee everything he or she needs to run a campaign based around these interesting characters.

An excellent sourcebook, though in general the internal artwork does let it down somewhat. However, for all those who want to try out a different angle in the *Cyberpunk* world, this supplement is something of a must.

Alex Bund **Score 7/10**

Atlas of the Young Kingdoms Volume 1: The Northern Continents

A supplement for *Elric!*
£13.95 Chaosium
001 510 547 7681 Out now

The world of *Elric!* is already pretty well documented. You've only got to read the many novels to know that much, but then trawling through the novels is a bit of a bind when you want to know what kind of flavour a certain city has, or where a forum is in any given town. Enter the first part in a series of four supplements for *Elric!* from Chaosium.

Volume 1: The Northern Continents covers the area of *Young Kingdoms* which stretches from The Sighing Desert right down to the Isle of the Purple Towns. It kicks off with a pretty general map of the region, and then goes through each district, domain and dwelling area to be found on said map. It provides heaps of information, gazetteer-like, on each location, detailing the important personalities together with other essential snippets of information.

This tome does a bloody good job at fleshing out the Northern Continents so that any referee can handle any number of adventures in the region. What it doesn't do is read very well. All right, so the author makes a real effort to embellish his copy with all manner of lurid detail and clever turns of phrase, but he seems to do so in such a way that it makes reading this supplement almost painful – it's all so horribly clichéd. This is a shame, because it means that instead of racing through it, eagerly devouring each paragraph as you progress, you end up either having to force yourself, or you waste time laughing over phrases such as, "Her head lies unnoticed in a far corner, a beatific smile still carved on her lips". That's a little more detail than I need about a smashed statue, but thanks anyway.

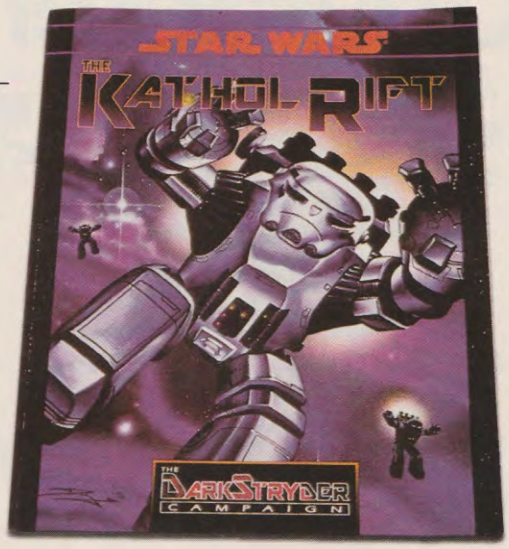
Paul Pettengale **Score 6/10**

The Kathol Rift

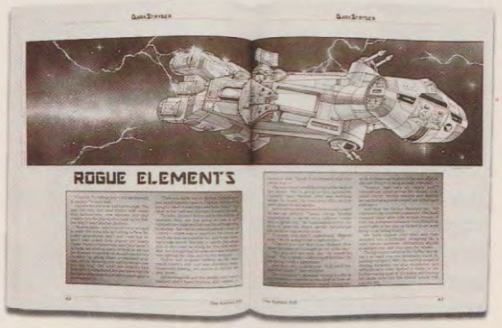
A *Darkstryder* campaign expansion for *Star Wars* £9.99 West End Games

001 717 253 6990 Out now

Aliens, Imperials and Mutiny — all in a day's work for New Republic heroes.



The Kathol Rift is the second adventure book for the on-going *Darkstryder* campaign. The boxed set, which was published last year, introduced us to the FarStar – a New Republic starship on a long-term mission to track down the evil Moff Sarn. At its centre were 30 or so extremely detailed player-characters who together made up the crew of the ship. Players were expected to chose their PCs from this pre-set list of characters.



It's not a coincidence that this set-up – a large crew who don't always get on, trekking through an unexplored chunk of space on a long-term quest – reads like the premise for a TV show, something along the lines of *Star Wars* meets *Star Trek: Voyager*. The five scenarios in *The Kathol Rift* are, essentially, five new episodes – a 'story arc' – in this on-going series. This is a distinctly new and intriguing approach to scenario design, which places a great emphasis on roleplay and character development.

At the beginning of this book our heroes rescue some prisoners from one of Sarn's correctional facilities. One of the prisoners is the long-lost sister of one of the PCs. Cue the dramatic reunion scene. Another is an heroic New Republic starpilot. But when we get back to the FarStar – and just after the ship has been hit by a dramatic energy storm – the heroic pilot decides he ought to be captain, and stages a mutiny. The ex-prisoners side with him, of course, placing brother and sister on opposite sides. That's one small strand of the overall plot – good, melodramatic stuff, assuming you have players who can carry it off.

On the other hand, this character-centred approach means that players are not always in control of their character's destiny. Gunthar is a monosyllabic, loyal, simple alien who doesn't know anything about his origins. A nice, fun character. In one of the scenarios the FarStar stumbles on his home planet and discovers that he is not in fact stupid at all, it's just that his race is a hive mind and he has been cut off from it. He gradually changes into an intelligent, cultured noble. This is certainly good plotting, but will players put up with this sort of character change being dictated to them by the referee? And will the referee really be able to keep track of exactly how the complicated plot impacts on this exceptionally large cast of characters?

If the answer is yes, then I strongly recommend this book. It features complex, multi-layered plots which push the envelope of roleplaying scenario design and still gives you a good chance to shoot some Stormtroopers.

Of course, whether I recommend it or not is neither here nor there. If you bought *Darkstryder*, then you really need this. Not stupid, these marketing dudes.

Andrew Rilstone

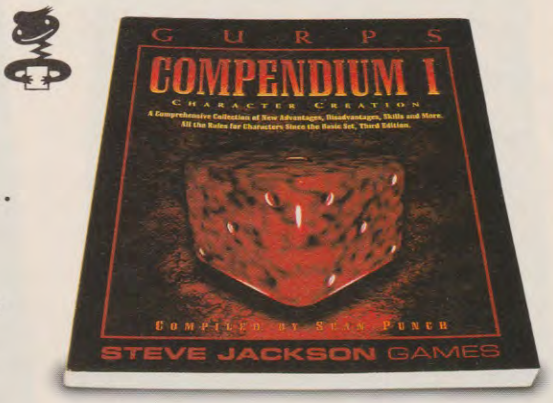
Score 7/10

GURPS Compendium 1: Character Creation

A supplement for *GURPS*

£14.95 Steve Jackson Games

001 512 447 7866 Out now



Now you can create any character you can imagine...

The first of a two-volume set, *GURPS Compendium I* compiles all the *GURPS* rules material related to character creation published since the *Basic Set* into one 192-page volume. In here you've got every bit of PC design material from every *GURPS* supplement ever published, as well as a few choice house rules and various snippets from SJG's *Pyramid* and late *Roleplayer* magazines.

GURPS works on a points-driven character generation system, and *Compendium I* is designed to accompany the *Basic Set* rulebook when players put pencils to paper. Typically for SJG products, the layout is clean and well-organised, arranged in the same order as the *Basic Set* chapters for ease of reference. Character stats are given a swift once-over, as are skills (with optional specialisation, linguistics and gadgeteering rules). There's also a section listing all the new general (not gameworld-specific) skills. Rounded out with chapters on manoeuvres (special attacks) and guidelines for generating non-human PCs, these sections hold together the two chapters detailing character advantages and disadvantages. Every possible positive and negative quirk and trait from every worldbook is here, broken down into handy sub-groups such as Mundane, Occult & Supernatural, and Racial & Super. While the book is essentially quite a dry read, the noted SJG sense of humour peeks through with talents such as Fashion Sense, Hard to Kill and No Hangover. As for disadvantages, there are such gems as Evil Twin, Tourette's Syndrome and Clueless – by far the best is Indecisive... or maybe Weirdness Magnet... Additional mileage comes from the bolt-on enhancements and limitations, which fine-tune the larger traits to create greater variance. Lastly, a set of four appendices indexes all the info herein, replacing the *Basic Set* lists.

You can't really say much about a volume like this – it's a rulebook full of rules with no system to lend it narrative colour, so naturally it's a bit like a textbook, but it's designed to be a reference guide and in that aspect it gets full marks. With this and the *Basic Rules*, ref and players have all they'll ever need to make characters from any world, anywhere; *Compendium II: Combat and Campaigns*, due out in November, will fill in the rest of the background blanks. The only things you don't get here are world-specific material, such as psionics, cybernetics or magic lists. Full-time *GURPS* campaigners playing across myriad gameworlds will find this book invaluable, but those playing in just one or two backgrounds should check it out before buying – it might be more than you need.

Jim Swallow

Score 6/10

Draconomicon

An expansion set for *Spellfire*

12-card booster expansion pack £1.99

TSR 01223 212517 Out now

About a year ago, for *AD&D* roleplayers and dungeon masters, TSR produced a *Draconomicon Handbook*, which explained about Dragons, their abilities and their cultures. It is mainly from this volume that the latest *Spellfire* expansion set has been researched. As you would expect with spellcasting Wyrms, it is accented towards magic, though the set is also bolstered by events and allies that are associated with Dragons and dragonkind.

Once again, most of the artwork used is from various larger masterpieces, but in general extra care has been taken to prevent absurd dissections and to ensure the pictures and text have common connections. With the new *Spellfire* 'one-card' now in force, it is worth taking stock of what these *Draconomicon* cards have to offer. Players will notice that Tiamat is noted as being 'God' of the Evil Dragons (surely that should be 'goddess'), and is shown to be not as strong, but better in play, than Bahamut, the God of the Good Dragons. With the cards being out of 100, the 25 chase cards make the full total for this set up to 125.

Unfortunately, the manner in which the cards are distributed means that you are likely to receive more than one card of a kind in a booster, and the chances of obtaining a rare card are slimmer than Kate Moss on a diet. It is quite noticeable that, as *Spellfire* expands, each new continuing set is being aimed at remedying the causes and effects of the previous boosters, thus several *Draconomicon* cards parry or block the blood abilities first made available in the previous *Birthright* expansion.

Chris Baylis Score 7/10

Tactical Air Support

A supplement for *Heavy Gear*

£10.99 Dream Pod 9

001 514 523 1360 Out now

Dream Pod 9's fighting mechasuit game takes to the hostile skies of planet Terra Nova with the latest supplement for *Heavy Gear*. Bolting on to the existing system, the book provides rules for all forms of aviation, from helicopters through blimps to supersonic

jets. Two rules scales for aerial combat are given – Air War for Battle of Britain-style engagements and Dogfight for head-to-head battles. While the idea of differing scales for differing sizes of battle makes sense, there's no scope to switch between them mid-game. The air-to-air combat system lacks set rulings for pitting aircraft against ground vehicles, and vice-versa.

Optional mechanics and design rules are joined by new equipment examples and 20 sets of aircraft stats. The requisite Gamesmaster section provides a few adventure seeds and 25 NPCs, enabling any ref to kick-start an aviation campaign quickly. An equipment chapter backs up to a couple of army lists and a reference section, filling out the book's 110 pages.

This is good stuff, but loses out because of its lack of counter-sheet and the problems switching between scales.

Jim Swallow **Score 5/10**

Legends of the Necronomicon

An expansion set for *Mythos*
13-card booster £2.25 Chaosium
001 510 647 7681 Out now

Just three months after the release of *Mythos*, the *Call of Cthulhu*-inspired CCG from Chaosium, comes the third expansion set, *Legends of the Necronomicon*, thus ending the 'limited edition' print run. This expansion is the best, even though it contains around 50 percent of the cards from the basic set.

The theme is the background setting for the Necronomicon, namely the middle-east, where the mad Arab Abdul Alhazrad penned the Kitab Al Azif – the scrolls from which the Necronomicon was translated. There are some excellent new locations, all based in middle-eastern cities, including the Al-Azhar University in Cairo and the Tomb of the Prophet Daniel in Alexandria.

There are also new allies, monsters, tomes and spells, which add more flavour to a game of *Mythos*. It's worth checking this expansion out to get hold of 'Save the World!', a massive 18-campaign point quest which requires you to play no less than 14 cards to score it.

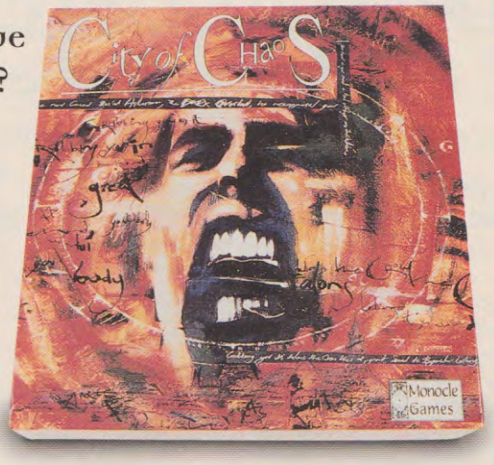
I enjoyed this expansion more than the previous two, but when Chaosium prints future unlimited expansion sets, it should drop the policy of including basic-set cards in the expansion mix.

Paul Pettengale **Score 7/10**

City of Chaos

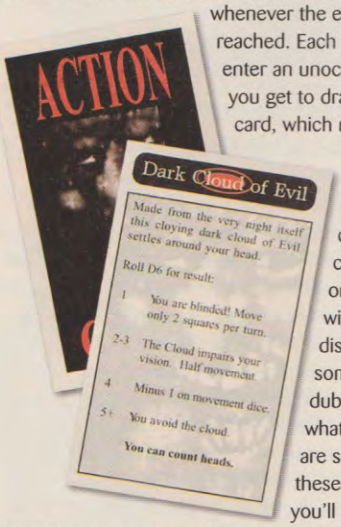
A fantasy board game £34.95 Monocle Games 01535 210114 Out now

Is your table large enough to cope with this exploratory adventure?



There is evil in the city, though its source is indeterminate, and you are alone in your quest to uncover the source of the malevolent forces which spawn this chaos. Well, you're almost alone, for there are between two and five other people who are trying to do just the same thing, only they're trying to do it before you.

The concepts of this innovative new board game are sound – you and your opponent players explore a city, moving across tiles (many of which contain Locations to visit), laying down a new, random tile whenever the edge of one is reached. Each time you enter an unoccupied tile you get to draw an Event card, which may result in a meeting with a diseased child, or the city watchman, or may end up with you discovering some item of dubious value – whatever, there are so many of these cards that you'll rarely come across the same event in the space of a game.


ACTION
Dark Cloud of Evil
Made from the very night itself this cloying dark cloud of Evil settles around your head.
Roll D6 for result:
1 You are blinded! Move only 2 squares per turn.
2-3 The Cloud impairs your vision. Half movement.
4 Minus 1 on movement dice.
5+ You avoid the cloud.
You can count heads.

City of Chaos is unique in two areas. First, many of the Events, and the huge majority of Locations, result in the player being given a number of choices. For example: do you a) accept the merchant's offer (if so, turn to 255) or b) punch him in the face (turn to 13). The numbers refer to passages in the *Tome of Chaos*, an accompanying book. These passages are read out, and so the game gains a narrative structure.

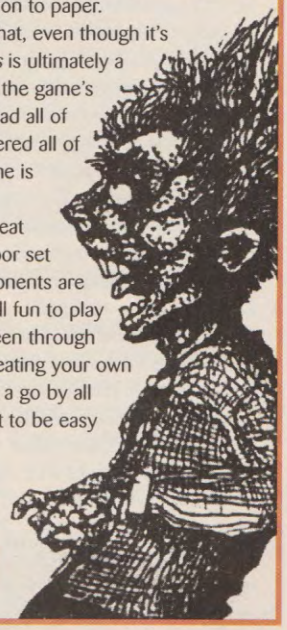
The second feature is the fact that you don't know what you're supposed to be doing in the city other than trying to defeat chaos. You discover the 'plot', as it were, by collecting clue cards on your travels. These cards tell you that if you manage to complete given tasks, you'll get more info which will lead you deeper into the plot and towards the completion of the game. This is great, but it makes for very long games, especially when playing with a full six people.

Indeed, after playing *City of Chaos* several times, it became apparent that six people is too many – the game becomes too slow. Because movement is resolved by rolling a D8 (rather than having a fixed movement of, say, five squares a turn), if you roll a low number and don't get on to a new, unoccupied tile or a Location, then nothing happens to you. If other players have plenty going on in their turns, it could quite easily be 20 minutes before you get to roll the dice again. Four people, I would recommend, should be a maximum, and two/three-player games are more fun.

Another huge problem is the rulebook. It's poorly written and completely misses out rules for some situations (we had to make up house rules for one thing or another at least 20 times). You can't escape the feeling that the game designers know how everything is supposed to work, but they just haven't been very good at putting that knowledge on to paper.

My last criticism is that, even though it's novel, the *Tome of Chaos* is ultimately a limiting factor in terms of the game's longevity. Once you've read all of the passages, and discovered all of the clues, playing the game is pretty dull.

City of Chaos is a great idea handicapped by a poor set of rules. The game components are of high quality, and it's still fun to play – but only after you've been through the lengthy process of creating your own set of house rules. Give it a go by all means, but don't expect it to be easy from the offset.



Paul Pettengale

Score 6/10

Fire and Blood:

Volume One of the Doomstones Campaign

A campaign for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* £14.95

Hogshead Publishing 0181 673 6340 Out now

A small band of heroes must save the world from chaos. Again.

The *Doomstones* campaign was originally published five years ago by Flame and marked its attempt to kick a little life back into the neglected *WFRP* system. After Games Workshop's legendary *The Enemy Within* campaign had finished it was left up to gamers to devise their own adventures or move on to another, better supported system. *WFRP* became the first widely supported system to suffer from a *shortage* of modules to run, and consequently most people eventually chose the latter option.

In some ways this was lucky, because *Doomstones* isn't really all that good. Put simply, it's about as subtle as a smack in the face with a Giant Slayer's axe. *WFRP's* core strength (whether you liked it or not) was its world development. No matter where or what you were up to you belonged somewhere. This gave rise to complex, interwoven and engrossing adventures where roleplaying rose above dice throwing. *Doomstones* reverses this to a large extent with an unsubtle hack 'n' slash adventure through the Vaults mountains bordering The Empire.

Fire and Blood actually contains the first two episodes, *Fire in the Mountains* and *Blood in Darkness*, of the four-part *Doomstones* campaign. The sequential adventures detail the party's quest to recover four ancient dwarven Crystals of Power, which if united in the wrong hands will spell v-i-c-t-o-r-y f-o-r c-h-a-o-s. It's a campaign designed to be started with a party of about four second or third

career characters and ideally played before *The Empire In Flames*. On the plus side the background information is excellent throughout *Fire and Blood*, making the campaign well suited to beginners – all you need is this and the main *WFRP* book, and you're off.

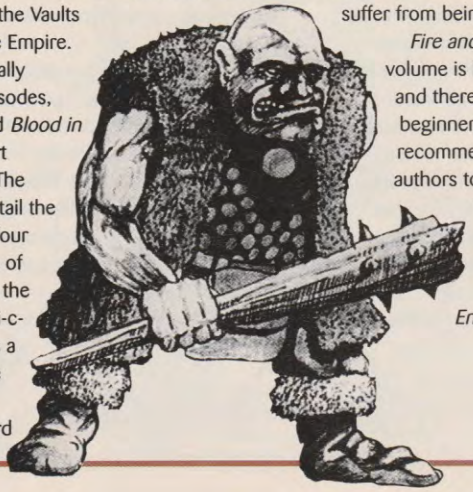
It's the implementation, however, that disappoints. There's too much combat, the wilderness settings become repetitive and the puzzles are far too similar to those within classic *AD&D* scenarios. There is a distinct lack of NPC interaction so the party can quickly become stale. Although the plot is well designed, the adventure itself soon becomes a case of fighting, opening a door, and then fighting (again).

To its credit the difficulty levels are well ramped throughout and the variety of enemies used is splendid (if a little improbable). As a pair of adventures the two episodes here connect perfectly, but considering they both involve hunting down similar artifacts they do suffer from being somewhat repetitive.

Fire and Blood is a worthwhile book. The volume is huge, it's well presented and written, and there are enough puzzles to keep beginner adventurers going. It's hard not to recommend it fully, if only to persuade other authors to get working on *WFRP* campaigns. The fact is, though, that as a stand-alone adventure it ignores *WFRP's* strengths and stomps into brash insignificance compared with *The Enemy Within's* finest moments.

Jim Flynn

Score 6/10



Conspiracy X Game Master's Screen

A referee's screen for *Conspiracy X*

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Having been delayed by the need to re-print the main rulebook, New Millennium Entertainment is getting back on schedule with its planned line of supplements and sourcebooks for the superb *Conspiracy X*.

The first of these is this ref's screen, which comes with a 48-page booklet containing a full adventure for the game. The screen is a typical four-panel affair, made from thick card that won't fall over at the slightest gust of air. The players' side displays diagrams of the three main alien races in glossy full-colour. The ref's side is in black and white, but gathers together just about every table from the game for easy reference during play.

What makes this package stand out is the adventure contained in the booklet. Even though it features the supernatural, Black Book agents, and an alien plot, it is straightforward for the referee to run due to the effort that's gone into its preparation. This is a great example of how to make an investigative scenario that doesn't get bogged down in complexity, and comes with a set of pre-generated characters and their cell's resources. In the UK at least this is somewhat pricey, but a fine adventure nonetheless.

Andy Butcher **Score 7/10**

Undead

Dragon Dice Kicker Pack 3 £4.99

TSR 01223 212517 Out now

This pack of eight creature dice (seven 6-siders and a polyhedral monster) is designed as an enhancement for your *Dragon Dice* army. However, once you have seen their possibilities, it's likely that you'll team them with a few Amazons to give them some missile fire and to increase the magic potential. Undead do not have missiles, but they are prominent in Death (Black) magic, and the combination with magic and missile Amazons is lethal. In fact, the possibilities are becoming so extensive that the original, official 23 point army rule has long gone among regular players, and fielding anything much less than 50-80 points generally means that at least 60% of your favourite dice never

reach the table. Undead only cast Black Magic, but they may also use their race-specifics which are Evil Eye, Fade, Restless Dead, Haunt and Night Moves.

The dice inside *Undead* do not match the colouring on the cover, which is a shame because black and white tends to be ideal for Ghouls, Ghosts, Vampires, Death Knights and their 'dead' comrades. However, the charcoal grey, black-tinged background of the dice sets off their fluorescent green icons, making them the most legible of the *Dragon Dice* armies to date. *Undead* adds the Vanish, Convert, Scare, Slay, Stun, Plague and Wither icons to the game as well as introducing the rare Vampire. Undead can also take 'stepped damage' (when killed units are traded in for lower points units), but because they are slow they can't charge into battle (unless under a Restless Dead spell).

The next *Kicker Pack* will be *Ferals*, a blue-green combination of naturally wild and savage primitives.

Chris Bayfis **Score 8/10**

Dracul Source Book

A supplement for *Immortal*

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001 602 894 1832 Out now

Following the recent *Shapeshifters Manual* (**arcane** 8), which dealt with the shapechanging powers of all immortal characters, the *Dracul Source Book* is the first in a line of Pride Books for the *Immortal* RPG, each of which will deal with a group of immortals. Members of Pride Dracul are associated with the Orient and South America, and in human form, most appear as members of the races native to these areas.

After a fictional intro, the *Dracul Source Book* looks at every aspect of the Pride. First its history is explored, then the various unique aspects. Dracul Dynasties (noble houses and their lineages), Callings (character types and 'careers'), Quiet Cultures (servant races), Enemies and Mantles (secret refuges) are all covered. There is also a chronology of the Pride, explanations of special skills, a glossary of terms and a list of background reading.

The *Dracul Source Book* displays the same depth and imagination as previous releases in the *Immortal* line, and is just as well put together. The text mixes fictional accounts with explanations and mechanics, which goes a long way towards creating the right atmosphere.

Andy Butcher **Score 7/10**

Player's Guide

for Changeling: The Dreaming

A supplement for *Changeling: The Dreaming* £12.99 White Wolf

001 404 292 1819 Out now

Native American faeries meet the European kith...

I know a number of roleplayers who won't play a White Wolf game until the Player's Guide is out. Not only is it irritating to design a character and then find you could have created a better version using the merits and flaws which only appear in the Player's Guide, but the first rule books always seem to have essential stuff missing.

This was certainly true of *Changeling*. The *Player's Guide* not only has new abilities, legacies, flaws and merits – some revamped from *Werewolf* or *Vampire* and some new – but also has an appendix of errata on the Autumn People, a section left out of the earlier rulebook due to a printer error.

So, if you have been waiting for the book to give you the elusive background information on the different races of fae kith, the reasons for Chrysalis, the various experiences that kithain go through as they learn of their true nature *and* a workable system for casting cantrips without using cards, this is it.

50-odd pages of expanded information on the nine basic kith give some great insights into their motivations. Redcaps, for example, might just seem like mindless louts, but were in fact the first kith who ruled in the Dark Ages before the Sidhe emerged and drove them underground. They learned to survive, returned to tarnish the Sidhe's Golden Age and look forward to the coming winter when the world will become dark again. Great stuff. The bulk of new material in the *Guide* concerns the Nunnehi – faerie spirits of the Native Americans. A brief rundown of Native American tribes from the different regions of the States is followed by details of 13 Nunnehi families associated with them. The Nunnehi are, unsurprisingly, environmental protectors, and draw their version of glamour – which they call medicine – from unspoiled areas of nature. They range from little people called May-may-gwya-shi who live in caves behind waterfalls to the Canotili of the grasslands and forests, and the Numuzo'ho who are fearsome giants with destructive tempers – self-styled avengers of the natural world. The Nunnehi have special ties with the spirit realms through totems – trees, plants or other natural phenomena. This might only be of marginal interest to British or Irish *Changeling* players who prefer to set games in our own faerie-rich isles, but it should have much more appeal for anyone using an American campaign background.

The artwork is colourful and attractive, the writing style is evocative and includes a short faerie story at the beginning. The supplement contains a lot of well-written, useful material. If you were originally put off *Changeling* because of its skimpy background, or because you didn't want to spend £50 on cards, this might make you reconsider. **Lucya Szachnowski**

Score 7/10

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by Michael Moorcock Published by White Wolf
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White Wolf is re-releasing Michael Moorcock's epic *Eternal Champion* sequence as a series of single volumes. This is, surely, great news for his fans, because most people tend to have an incomplete assortment of his paperbacks and won't have read the whole of the sequence in its correct order. *Von Bek* is the second in the series and the first, *The Eternal Champion,* is already out.

Von Bek encompasses four works: *The War Hound and the World's Pain, The City in the Autumn Stars, The Dragon in the Sword* and *The Pleasure Garden of Felipe Sagittarius.* Throughout we follow the fortunes of the Champion in

"I sheathed my pistol and turned my horse towards the castle. I had taken my first decisive step towards Hell."

(from *The War Hound and the World's Pain)*

his incarnations of the Von Beks – a German aristocratic family whose charge is the protection of the Holy Grail throughout history. Through the Von Beks' adventures – in this plane of existence, and in others – Moorcock portrays the great upheavals of our times as an aspect of the struggle between the forces of Law and Chaos throughout his Multiverse.

The variety of places, characters and incidents conjured up in *Von Bek* is astonishing. Much of the action in the stories takes place in the Mittle March – a plane that in some ways resembles our own save that the seasons are reversed, the fantastic resides there, and only the damned may pass into it through its gates. For this wondrous place alone, this is a book worth reading. For storytelling skill and original thought, it's a book that stands tall alongside anything else Moorcock has written.

Gideon Kibblewhite

Score 9/10

The Sunspacers Trilogy

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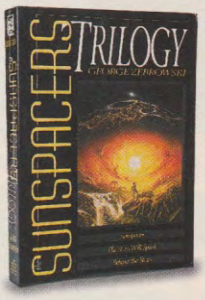


It is the next century. Mankind has colonized the solar system and now, ceaselessly curious, looks ever outwards into the Galaxy. People routinely commute throughout the Sunspace, from Mercury to Pluto, mining, researching and adventuring. Some people are now being born on other planets and only know Earth as someone from the New World might 'remember' Europe.

"Earth is so small."

So, anyone involved in a space opera might think themselves well advised to read this. And they're right, but this trilogy is very much set in this solar system and includes intricate, scientific explanation of the planets that orbit our sun. This takes precedence over adventure. You might find this dull, as our protagonist does, or you might be into this sort of thing, like me.

The story begins with a student preparing to continue his studies. This isn't really very interesting, even though he's going off-planet to study. As he learns, he comes across philosophy and politics, as students do. Still not very interesting. He has student adventures, he speaks to his Mom and Dad as they go through their divorce, checks out girls and stuff, gets his grades, goes for a job…

I expected the story to hot up when he got to Mercury, but it didn't. It's well built, but I found it uninspiring when taken purely as a piece of fiction. It seems I'm in a minority, but I felt Zebrowski could do a lot more to argue how humans might live in space than show that people from Earth can jump higher than people from Mercury, and that people from Mercury don't like that.

The Sunspacers Trilogy consists of *Sunspacer* (1984), *The Stars Will Speak* (1985) and, printed here for the first time in book form, *Behind The Stars* (1993). If it were made into a film, it would probably have Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman in it.

Jonathan Palmer Score 6/10

Riverrun Trilogy

by S P Somtow Published by White Wolf
Large format paperback US$14.99 Out now

Any regular traveller to the netherworld twixt life and death, twixt darkness and light (or indeed, to any other alternate universe where Dark Forces toy with the sanities of mere mortals), will undoubtedly appreciate the publication

of this trilogy in one volume. It's obviously applicable for players of *W:TO*, but will also serve anyone running a *Planescape* or *Cthulhu* campaign – for example, Somtow is also well-known for his vampires *(Vampire Junction*, 1984) and these feature here, too.

Switching between the life of an ordinary, young family typical of the modern American horror novel, and a dream-like existence beyond the realms of reality where dragons fly, these books focus on Theo Etchison's involvement in the evil battle between beings that would use his truthsaying abilities to gain cosmic power far beyond his ken.

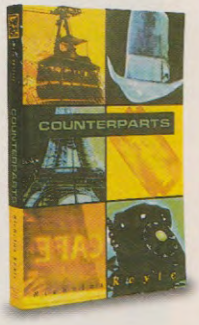
"...hopelessly humanist sensibilities and incurable distrust of higher authority."

The trilogy of *Riverrun* (1991), *Armorica* (1992) and *Yestern* (1996) begins in this decade before the 'mad millennium', but clinical insanity is never far from the plot; witness the theory of a shaman as a paranoid schizophrenic, the vision of Jesus as an air freshener. Then there's *King Lear, Don Quixote, Alice in Wonderland* and Krishna – Somtow blends Thai and English, as well as Hindu and Judaeo-Christian, to suggest that we must find and accept our true selves in order to find peace. These books are better read at night, preferably all night. Now, I'm looking forward to seeing his film, *The Laughing Dead*.

Jonathan Palmer Score 7/10

Counterparts

by Nicholas Royle Published by White Wolf
Paperback US$5.99 Out now



The word 'disturbing' is over-used in book reviews, but this time I use it advisedly, as a warning: this book really is disturbing. I don't consider myself easily shocked by what I read or see on TV, but in truth I tell you, I found myself squirming in revulsion at some of the graphic scenes described in *Counterparts*. Had it not been for the fact that this is a debut novel of great quality – a thought which makes it all the more horrifying, in fact – I might well have put it down before the end.

The story is about two people: Gargan, a tightrope walker who mutilates himself in his sleep, and Adam Midwinter, a struggling actore with an identity crisis. The two lurch through their lives which to them are a living

"Now he carefully inserts a double thickness of paper tissue into the cut to stop it knitting."

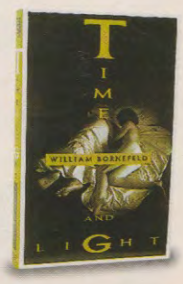
nightmare. For the reader, too, what is real and what is dreamed remains blurred as we are faced with a barrage of images: of razor slashed bodies in the bath, of coughing up blood in a crowded railway carriage, of that walking through syrup feeling that only nightmares provide. As the two heroes (and they are heroes, for they earn sympathy) struggle to find out what the hell is wrong with them, they are drawn together towards an electrifying climax.

It's a strange, brave and well-written psychological mystery, but don't give it to your mother for Christmas.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 8/10

Time and Light

by William Bornefeld Published by White Wolf
Paperback US$5.99 Out now



Every genre of fiction has some ideas and concepts that have been used so many times that they've become stale and stereotypical. In science fiction, one of them is the restrictive 'police state/false utopia', previously seen in *Brave New World, 1984, Logan's Run* and *THX 1138*, among many others. It's also the basis for William Bornefeld's *Time and Light*.

Of course, just because an idea has been used before doesn't mean that it's not possible to use it again and still end up with a good book (or film, or game for that matter). However, to do so requires either a new approach to the idea or very good writing (or both). Unfortunately, *Time and Light* has neither.

"Noreen heard the familiar crackling noise overhead. Jagged lines of yellow fire from the arc-igniters were streaking across the dome ceiling near the two remaining climbers."

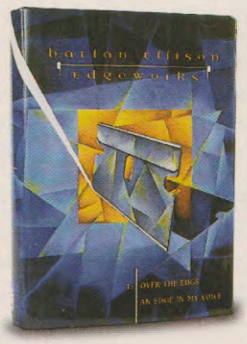
The main character, Dr Noreen, comes across a collection of photographs from the 20th century, which inspire the traditional 'strange new thoughts' in the good doctor. The story then details his struggle to deal with his new-found enlightenment. All the usual elements are here – enforced drug use, sealed habitats, sexual repression, a history involving a global disaster to explain how the current situation came about, and so on.

It's not that *Time and Light* is a bad book – it's quite well written, if a bit over-stylised, and the plot is well structured – it just isn't good enough to get away with so many clichés and stereotypes of the genre.

Andy Butcher Score 4/10

Edgeworks

by Harlan Ellison Published by White Wolf
Hardback US$21.99 Out now



Harlan Ellison is considered to be one of the best SF writers ever. His list of works is immense, and his credits stretch from underground magazine columns to writing what is largely regarded as the best episode of *Star Trek* ever *(City on the Edge of Forever)*. White Wolf has now published a limited anthology of his works, including the novel *Over the Edge*. And, it has to be said, it's not an easy read.

We all take ourselves a little too seriously sometimes – not one of us is free of

"My lips peeled back like a wolf's. I didn't have the reason or the heart to express my loathing for what he had done."

this fault, but, it would appear, entertaining though he frequently is, Harlan Ellison is more guilty than most on this score. His magazine articles (which form the bulk of this 500-plus page hardback) are pretty heavy going – they read like a novelist desperately trying to be clever by embellishing his prose with flourishes which really aren't necessary, when all he's got to say is that he's pissed off about a mate who's only got a few thousand dollars for a book manuscript, when someone else he knows has got a few million.

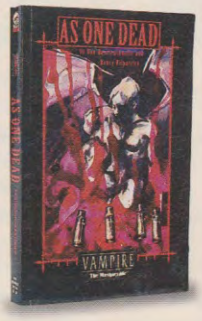
Having said that, it is pretty interesting to get a glimpse inside the mind of a man so many of us have had (for the most part) anonymous experience of. Ellison is an interesting guy, it's just that he really wants you to know the fact. Yes, this is a worthy collection of works, but I wonder if anyone will actually read all of it cover to cover. It's a bit like Hunter Thomson's *Great Shark Hunt* – it's good to dip in and out of, but reading it as a whole is a herculean task.

Paul Pettengale

Score 6/10

As One Dead

by Don Bassingthwaite and Nancy Kilpatrick
Published by White Wolf Paperback US$5.99 Out now



The single greatest advantage that White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* has over other settings for vampire novels is the sheer number of undead stalking its nights. With numbers comes society, and the structure provided by the various Clans and Sects allows gamers and authors alike a great deal of scope for stories of politics and conflict between different groups of vamps. This is where Anne Rice shot herself in the foot (bit herself in the neck?) – with only half-a-dozen vampires in her fantasy world, there were only so many potential stories to tell.

As One Dead tells the tale of two powerful vampires on opposing sides of a bitter power struggle. The Sabbat, vicious

> "Once Fletcher tired of watching the guard beat Razor into unconsciousness, he ordered her to stop. He was a hands-on madman; not one for vicarious thrills."

undead who revel in the dark side of their natures, are the secret rulers of Toronto. When Bianka arrives to lead the subjugated Camarilla vampires in rebellion, she finds herself set against Lot, a leader of the Sabbat. Without wanting to give too much away, it's fair to say that the resulting events have more than a touch of *Romeo and Juliet* about them – albeit masked in the grim darkness of White Wolf's gameworld.

There's virtually no point in reading *As One Dead* unless you're familiar with *Vampire: The Masquerade* – the book tends to assume that the reader understands the basics of the background. For players and referees of the game, however, it does have some merit, and makes for an enjoyable read.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

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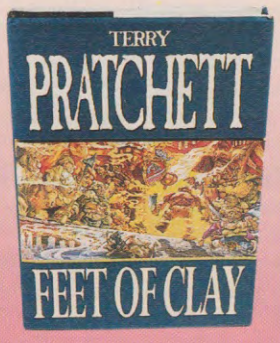

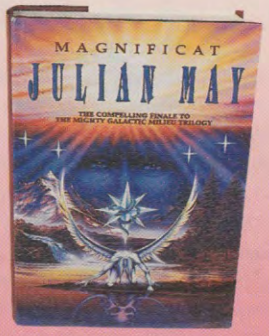

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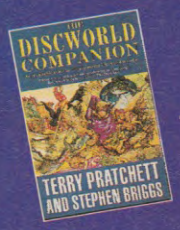

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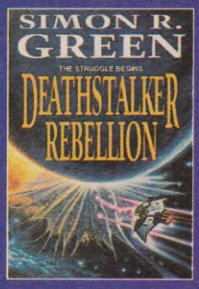

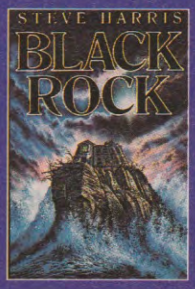

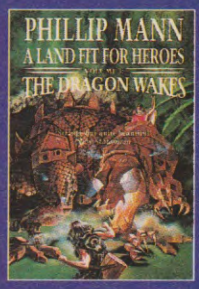

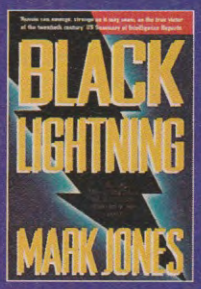

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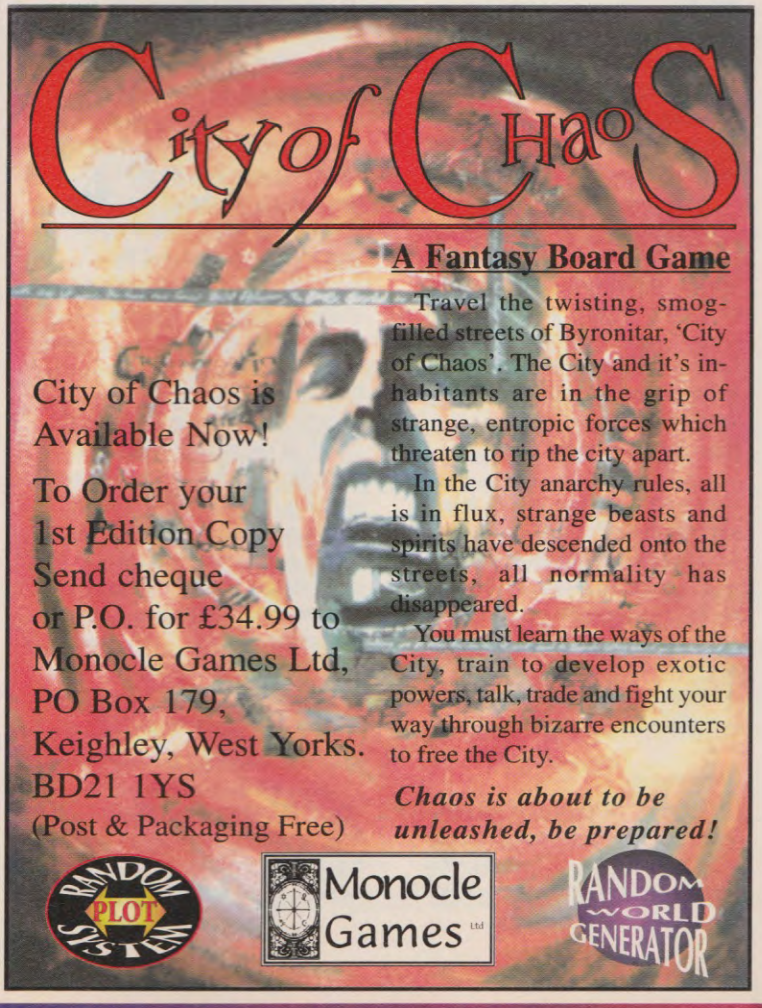
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arcane scribblings

Congratulations, you've made it to the arcane letters pages, where we take it on the nose like the best of them. Enjoy the show...

Dear arcane,

Having read your Pull Yourself Together feature in **arcane** 9, I feel I must comment. Though I agree that characters should fit into the game, you need a referee who warns you when you build the wrong character.

"No effort made to police character generation"

One of my characters was a veteran who fought in the Vietnam war (or was it Korea?) and got out of it with a broken mind and an intense hatred of orientals. Of course, at the end of the adventure's intro, all our characters got frozen, and woke up in a cyberpunk scenario, ruled by Japanese corporations (we had no clue beforehand). My character just couldn't adjust, and eventually committed suicide trying to kill some Japs. This struck me as frustrating – I'd gone through the effort of building a decent character, only to see him die because the referee hadn't made any effort to police the character generation process.

Regarding the idea of throwing alignments out, I'm against it. While the *AD&D* alignments are limiting, if you use them as they are described in the rulebook (and I interpret them differently), picking an alignment sets the attitude the character has towards society and his fellow man (or woman, or dwarf, or alien). This is something that can be looked over, especially for subtle characters (those which are unlike the archetypes you present in the article). The four character-defining questions presented in the article are a good example of how such fundamental issues can be ignored.

Eyal Teler, e-mail

All decent referees should, without doubt, guide the players when they're rolling up characters – what's the point in allowing players to create a character that's quite obviously incongruous with the precepts of the game that is to be played? (Yes, there are situations when incongruity is a good thing, but not when it results in frustration on the part of the player.)

As far as alignment is concerned: as demonstrated by the paladin character which was used to illustrate the article, alignment can sometimes make roleplaying easier – it acts as a guide for players which considers how their characters should react in any given situation, but alignment should be used as no more than just that – a guide – and not as a limiting factor.

Dear arcane,

Your game reviews are fine – they give us enough details to make informed decisions on what to buy. However, I do object to book reviews, largely on the basis that the books reviewed are cash-in rubbish (as stated by some of the reviews of the *AD&D* spin-offs in **arcane** 9). So, why bother? Wouldn't it be better to review material that could genuinely help roleplaying campaigns, rather than helping to publicise conveyor-belt, hack-produced parodies of

"The books reviewed are cash-in rubbish"

fantasy literature? Some helpful bibliographies are provided with many of your features, and I think that this is all that is needed in terms of pointing people in the right literary direction, don't you?

Ray Gillham, Swansea

I like our book reviews, though it is unfortunate that there's too much dross published in the fantasy and sci-fi genres. This month we've taken the book reviews section down by a page – how do you feel about that? And, indeed, do you think **arcane** *should be covering books at all? Let me know what you think.*

Dear arcane,

I was glad to see a review of the *James Bond 007* RPG in **arcane** 9, though as a retro', surely not! I still play this game. I was disappointed to see you denigrate the *James Bond* CCG again (you did so the first time in your review in **arcane** 5). I would like to redress the balance slightly by saying that this is a CCG I thoroughly enjoy – it's well balanced, well presented and it's highly playable (even with just one starter pack).

Greg Smith, Corby

Without trying to state the obvious, the James Bond *RPG was featured in our Retro' section because it's an old game – we're not suggesting that games we cover as Retro' reviews aren't played by anyone any more. Indeed, part of the reasoning behind the Retro' column is to encourage gamers to take up some of the RPGs which they may have forgotten about, or (in the case of newcomers to the hobby) which they may not know exist. And sorry, but the* James Bond *CCG isn't 'up there' on my list of great card games – I found it really rather dull...*

Dear arcane,

A copy of your mag is doing the rounds in the gaming circles here in Australia, and it has really impressed us. Each country's magazine has a certain noticeable local style, which can act as a barrier when trying to go international. Happily, though, this isn't the case with **arcane** – all who I've spoken to think you're doing a great job! We're asking our local games shop to order more in (it's cheaper than subscribing).

John Baillie, e-mail

One of the reasons that **arcane**'s *doing so well is because we've managed to establish ourself overseas, and it would be great to see*

communication

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Gender bender

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

I first heard of Julian May many years ago, but it was only recently when I started reading *The Saga of the Exiles* that it suddenly dawned on me – Julian is a man's name! For years I thought the author was a woman. What a fool I felt! I suppose I was confused by the fact that May is a girl's name and Julian is not a million miles away from Julia.

When I read your review of *Magnificat* in **arcane** 8, I couldn't help wondering... Was I right in the first instance, or is a certain magazine editor just as incompetent as I when it comes to the gender of authors?

Paul Cockburn, Leicester

Funny, because when I first read The Saga of the Exiles, *I thought Julian May was a man, and it was only later (upon the publication of* The Sage of the Exiles Companion *in 1986) that I realised my mistake. Julian May, as confirmed by a number of interviews and photographs of her, is indeed a woman. And a bloody talented woman at that.*

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Dear arcane,

I have, up until now, managed to whip almost all of the nine issues of **arcane** from my sparse local paper shop, and congrats on a reasonably diverse output so far. However, strangely, it's taken me nine issues to notice an erroneous quip you've been playing with. Maybe I'm wrong on this one, but I can't understand why you insist upon referring to whoever is running a gaming session as the 'referee', rather than the somewhat more common phrase 'gamesmaster'. Are we playing football here? I think not. Have you ever heard any of your roleplaying chums refer to the GM as the referee when playing a game? Probably not. So why use this phrase, when the roleplaying hobby has already established a better one?

Stephen Ball, Carmarthen

The word 'referee' was chosen instead of 'gamesmaster' because, quite simply, the word referee is more generic. Some games call the referee Gamesmaster, some Dungeon Master, others Keeper – using gamesmaster would be connotative of those games which use that term. So, 'referee' it is.

Dear arcane,

As a referee of some years' experience I felt I had to comment on Andy Butcher's article on simplifying PCs in **arcane** 8 (Heading in the Right Direction). Although the article was well written, I felt it overstated the case and that some balance is needed...

I've noticed that the more a player is involved with his or her character, the more he or she will roleplay. If a PC is a two-dimensional, faceless piece of cannon fodder he will be played that way, which is all very well for 'plunder' style gaming, but not for more involved roleplaying. The article suggests that players should come up with a few personality traits, as opposed to a system such as *GURPS* (which I think was unfairly criticised), which encourages the use of Advantages/Disadvantages. This ad-hoc arrangement is all very well, but how do you encourage players to be true to their originally stated motives? By simplifying characters too

"Simplifying characters makes them boring"

much, you make them boring, or that much harder for anyone to play effectively. Rules systems which give a solid framework for a complex character should, therefore, be encouraged rather than put down.

Mike Hill, Harlow

I have to agree with you, up to a point (sorry Andy!). Characters which really have been thought about before they're ever played can, and often do, end →

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letters

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We try to fit as many letters in as we can, but there's more chance to appear if you keep it short...

I was flicking through **arcane** 8 and I noticed that the miniatures section has gone – is that for good, or will it be back?

Richard Cardall

I'm afraid we're no longer covering figures – those pages weren't at all popular with the majority of our readers. Sorry about that.

If you do not print this letter I will be forced to make a Paul Pettengale voodoo doll and stick loads of pins in it.

Happy Person

Well, we printed part of it, does that mean I escape your suggested reprisal?

You Christians invented the Devil (around 800AD), not us innocent roleplayers!

His Sagasity

Well, that told 'em.

It seems that you're here to stay and I may even risk a full year's subscription as proof of my belief.

Steve Higgins

*I'm glad to hear you're finally getting the picture: **arcane** is definitely not going away, ever!*

The point of Paul Pettengale's criticisms of *AD&D* (Magical Mystery Tour, **arcane** 8) are iniquitous and misleading, especially in the light of recent expansions. In the final analysis, it's not the game, it's the way you play it.

Alexander F Simkin

Which was exactly the point of the feature!

← *up being that much more 'rounded' from the outset. Simple characters are quick and easy to get started with, but if their personalities are not mapped out in advance, the player can fall into the trap of contradiction by having the character act in one manner during one session, and in another manner entirely during the next. Going overboard, however, and writing sheets and sheets of character background is, more often that not, a waste of time and effort.*

Dear arcane,

Cheers for a stunning mag, but I have one major problem: listing various events is good, but if we don't know what's going on there, how can we choose which ones we should attend? Is it not possible to dedicate a section of the magazine to upcoming events, splitting them up into areas of interest (live roleplaying, table-top *AD&D*, card games, wargaming and so on)? I think that would be far more useful than the listings you currently publish in Despatches.

Adam, no address given

> "How can we chose which events to attend?"

That's a great idea, and I'd love to oblige. However, the information we print regarding conventions is what we're given, so if a convention organiser sends us details of an event, and fails to state what games are being played, there's precious little we can do about it. So – calling all convention people – when you send in your con' details, don't forget to include as much information about the event as possible. Thank you.

Dear arcane,

After reading Helen Flynn and her pal's letter in **arcane** 8, I have to wonder – how do Helen and her friend (together with all other "girl gamers") suggest they're going to show the lads, "how it's done"? Are they suggesting we should all be throwing the die in a certain style, or ensuring that our characters have fashion sense?

Or are they going to play like everyone else? Let's face it Helen, what's more important – being concerned with what your character is doing, or worrying about the gender of the other players around the gaming table? I've played with many female roleplayers, and they've all played in the same way and for the same reasons as the blokes – the prime concern is to have a good time. I suggest you do the same.

Matthew Tucker, Abington Biggar

Sounds fair enough to me, though I do think you're taking a throwaway comment a little too seriously.

Dear arcane,

I was very shocked and disappointed to read the article 'To Live and Let Die' in **arcane** 6, especially given that it was written by the editor – the person who should be the ambassador of your magazine. Is he:

1. Trying to make roleplayers look stupid to the lay person? I had to convince my wife (a non-roleplayer) who read the letters section of the magazine and asked me (as a GM): "I didn't know that you killed characters unfairly – isn't that like the framing cases the police have been involved in, such as the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six?" I told her that the editor was stupid and obviously not an experienced roleplayer, to which she questioned his suitability as the editor of a roleplaying magazine.

Or:

2. Trying to scare away potential intelligent readers and reduce the profitability of his magazine by suggesting that by experiencing death as a player, you can get some idea of what death is like for real?

I don't know where Mr Pettengale was educated, but one does not put your children's hands in the fire so they can experience pain. Mr Pettengale would have gained more respect by first asking readers to write in and inform him how they dealt with death in their campaigns.

Nick Street, Bedford

I'm amazed, quite frankly, that you've so obviously missed the point of the feature (which was, for those of you who haven't read it, a discourse on why killing characters in campaigns is a generally healthy thing because it gives players the chance to play new, more diverse characters). I never suggested that killing characters in a game (yes, a game) is going to prepare them for their own physical deaths. I can't believe that in response to your wife's question you didn't reply: "No, killing characters in a roleplaying 'game' is no more like serious miscarriages of justice than having a queen removed from the board in a game of chess."

Get a grip: death in a roleplaying game is not a serious issue – it's a game mechanic, a concept which has no baring on reality. I'm sorry if you somehow managed to misconstrue the meaning of the article, but it strikes me that you're taking the roleplaying hobby more than a little bit too seriously. Take a leaf out of this chap's book...

Dear arcane,

Help! I need your paranormal X-pertise! My bedroom has become the focus for the activities of the cyber-highlords of the hyper domain that X-ists outside human X-perience. Not only did, at 3.30pm today, a string that I had just removed from my guitar mysteriously become about three inches shorter so I couldn't put it back on again, BUT ALSO, five minutes later my tuner stopped working. This is obviously a CONSPIRACY! Oh, now I'm getting over X-cited.

> "Help! I need your paranormal X-pertise!"

David Dolliver, Pitochry

At which point it's time to wrap up another episode of the **arcane** *letters pages. I hope you've all enjoyed your trip, and I trust you'll join us again next month for more comments on* **arcane** *and the gaming industry.*

arcane On-Line

arcane is now available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Point your Web browser at http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html *to join in the fun...*

The site it is a-changing. As we mentioned last month, the **arcane** World Wide Web site is undergoing something of an overhaul at the moment. In addition to all the usual forums, contacts and reader ads, the new-look site will also enable you to access a complete database of **arcane**'s reviews. There'll also be a feast of thought-provoking features and oodles of helpful gaming advice. All of this plus a focused look at *AD&D, Call of Cthulhu, Shadowrun, Earthdawn, World of Darkness, Cyberpunk 2020, Traveller, Warhammer, Magic: The Gathering* and *Netrunner.*

Naturally, you'll also be able to check out the latest news reports and convention details. And if your modem's feeling particularly racy, why not take a trip to the editor's Web site of the week, or a tour of our selection of game and company links? But there's more to it than that...

Karen Levell, On-line Editor klevell@futurenet.co.uk

Web site of the month

Where is it?

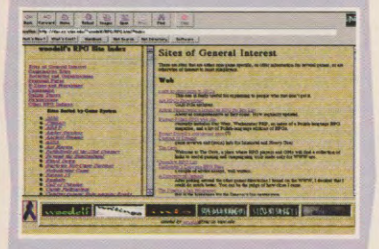
http://dax.cs.wisc.edu/~woodelf/RPG/RPG.html#index

What is it?

All the gaming links you could ever want...

What's it like?

Possibly the most comprehensive list of gaming links anywhere on the Internet, and with a simple indexing system to boot. Whether you want to look for all the sites that relate to a particular game, get in touch with an on-line game store or check out various societies and organisations around the world, Woodelf's offers you a straightforward one-click menu to all the relevant sites, along with a brief description of what you can expect when you get there. The site uses frames, but loads quickly thanks to a complete lack of large cumbersome graphics. And while the site is based in the US, it caters for a worldwide audience. In fact, many of the roleplaying societies it lists are based here in the UK. There's also a UK mirror site at http://www.ed.ac.uk/~geas/woodelf/index.html, which could be a lifesaver if you need to log on in the evening while America is awake.



Links, links and more links. Woodelf's RPG site is probably the most comprehensive list of gaming links anywhere on the Internet.

Welcome to the arcane forum – here's a taster of what you can find there...

Our forum is organised into various 'threads'. Basically, different topics are discussed under appropriate headings. One of the popular threads at the moment in entitled 'Strange skills', and it's where roleplayers have been quoting some of the more interesting or odd character skills they've managed to come across since they started getting involved in the hobby. Or at least, it started out that way. In recent weeks people have been taking it a little too far...

I found one pseudo-Italian NPC in a *WFRP* adventure with a 'Spaghetti Eating' skill. Presumably this is the ability to eat spaghetti without seriously embarrassing yourself. Not easy.

Martin,
Cbrain@aladdin.co.uk

Here is a list of interesting skills which all my players seem to have in abundance:

1) Convince DM
A successful use changes the DM's mind to allow you to do something that you can't. Often used with (3).

2) Jammy Dice Roll
Allows a player to consistently roll successes no matter how hard the roll is. Roleplayers who are also wargamers often possess this one.

3) Rules Quibble
Allows players to look through the rule book and explain why their 16 year-old weakling PC can throw cars, arm wrestle minor Gods, avoid death, etc.

4) Spill Beer
This allows players to spill beer over the DM's books/scenarios/papers.

5) Unpunctuality
Ensures that at least one player is always late, no matter what time the game is due to start.

6) Step on Cat
Ensures that someone always steps on the cat. Usually results in a long-term feline nervous condition.

7) Lose Character Sheet
Allows players to remember that all stats/skills/powers are at a spookily high level. They need to remember this because they always seem to forget their character sheet.

David,
cjmorr@essex.ac.uk

I liked the last message in this subject so much that I've printed it out to show to my players! But you forgot one extremely important skill: Lose the Thread. This allows players to become so deeply involved in a discussion about anything other than the game at hand that they completely forget what is happening. This skill is strangely unaffected by the Become Involved in the Plot skill, so that no matter how interesting the players find the game, last night's TV/movie/drinking/gossip session will somehow always seem even more interesting to them than the game.

Mad Mark,
u9426825@qub.ac.uk

Well, it made us laugh...

Club crawl

Do you run a roleplaying club? Or a league for card players? Are you looking for new members? Well, **arcane** on-line can help. Simply send us the details of your club on the form below and we'll enter them into our forthcoming Club Directory. Please complete using block capitals.

Club name .....

Where do you meet? .....

When do you meet? .....

Which games do you play? .....

Are there any restrictions (students only, meeting fees, etc)? .....

Contact name .....

Contact telephone number .....

Contact e-mail address .....

Contact Web site .....

Send to: Karen Levell, arcane on-line, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW. Or you can e-mail the details to klevell@futurenet.co.uk.

free reader ads

And so they came from all over the land, with burdened, weary asses...

games for sale

● *AD&D 1st edition*, players, DMs, Monsters etc, want to swap for fantasy miniatures and *Warhammer*. Chris 01387 710287

● Bookcase games, *Dune* (Avalon Hill). *Middle-earth* (simulations publications), both published. Late 1970s. Complete. VGC. Offers. Sarah 01273 472621

● *D&D, AD&D, Storyteller* and *Battletech/Mechwarrior* games for sale. Alan 0191 3887122

● *D&D/AD&D, TMNT*, mags (*White Dwarf, Dragon* etc). 01269 594956 or send sae to Gareth Morgan, Llety Dderwen, Myddynfych, Ammanford, Carms SA18 2EB

Probably easiest to phone.

● Deluxe *Runequest*. Also *Monster Coliseum* and *Glorantha* supplements, as new. £35 the lot. James 01642 570303

● *Deluxe RQ3, Glorantha, Elder Secrets, Gods/Glorantha, Dorastor, Sun County, River Cradles*. £10 each. Martin, 22 Blackwood Hse, Nelson Rd, Portsmouth PO1 4NF

● For sale – RPGs, mags, board games etc. Send sae to Jon Simcoe, (RPG) 34 Charles Street, Kettering, Northants NN16 9RN

● Trust no-one! *Paranoia* supplements for sale – sae to Jeremy, 6 Dunoon Close, Calcot, Reading, Berks RG31 7YJ

● *Warhammer* supplements, *Man of War, White Dwarfs, Dungeons & Dragons* and *Dragons*. Kester, afternoons, 01963 210544

cards for sale

● 2,500 *M:TG* cards. 100s uncommon and rare. £200 ono. Chris 01923 852645

● 60-card *M:TG* ready-to-play decks, 11 colours. Only £5 each. Marc 0121 6021721

● *Ancient Hearts* trades. James 01705 378442

● Complete set of *Star Wars* black border CCG, plus many rares, all at good prices. Robert 01733 266719

● Cards for sale. Most games. Send large sae stating interests. Jon Simcoe, 34 Charles Street, Kettering, Northants NN16 9RN

● *Magic Italian Legend* boosters. £10.50 per booster inc UK p&p. Adam Reynolds, daytime, weekdays, 01749 682656

● *Magic* unlimited full set, plus *Dark Antiquities* and most *Arabian Nights, Legends*. Mike 01973 952338

● *Magic: The Gathering* collector's set and any cards for expansions predating *Fallen Empires*, ie. *Dark Legends*. Gareth 012477 28613

● *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* CCG collection for sale. Ssae for list. Most cards available. Ian 01736 332800

wanted

● *Buck Rogers* PC games. Alan Jones, 17 Waterlane, Cromford, Matlock, Derbys DE4 3QH

● *Cyberpunk* accessories, any offers considered. Particularly hunting accessory *Night City* sourcebook. Also any useful miniatures. Alan 0191 3887122

Alan tells us he had a "great response" to his ad for roleplayers in the Durham/Newcastle area. He has work commitments at the moment but promises to get in touch with everyone as soon as time permits.

● **arcane** #1. Name your price! Roger 01706 228209

Only a fool would part with their copy of **arcane** *1.*

● *Dragon Warriors* books, 2 through 6, and *Mythus Bestiary*. Rob on 01902 336465

● Desperately need *Arabian Adventures*. If you can help, phone Steve 01721 720195

● Games Workshop limited edition *Apocalypse* 100 Space Marine veteran sergeant centurius. Peter Gurnett, 48 Denny Ave, Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 1NT

● *Marvel Superheroes* RPG, sourcebooks and expansions. Jon 01302 768176

● Good condition *WFRP* modules *Lichmaster, Death's Dark Shadow*. Graham, Paddock House, W Haddon Rd, Watford NN6 7UN

● *Hawkmoon* boxed set wanted. Must be complete. Reasonable prices. May consider photocopy. Dave 0161 7180097, evenings.

Of course, photocopying copyright material is illegal and not condoned by **arcane**. *Remember what home taping did to the music industry? No, maybe that's not a very good example, but the point holds.*

● I will buy your unwanted RPGs, board games, wargame rules, figures, magazines etc, anything considered. Contact 01933 386888

● Players for *CoC, Shadowrun*, etc. Matt 01705 696477 matthew.scott@metricom.seuk.com

● Printout of *Greyhawk: Ivid the Undying*. Will buy or trade. Tony 01505 328202

● SSI's 'Gold Box' *Forgotten Realms, AD&D* computer games *(Pools of Radiance)* etc. For IBM compatible PC. Contact Ghost 01207 236487

● *Star Trek: TNG* sourcebooks and *Dr Who* sourcebooks and modules (not FASA *Daleks)* wanted. Write to: K Singer, 104 Wyche Ave, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 5HL

clubs

● Bromley Games Club. Every Sunday, Star & Garter, 12-6pm. Chris 0181 7770054

● Finchley Games Club, Woodside Park, London N12. Card games, board games and roleplaying. Ian 01707 263021. Alan 0181 4407426

● Gloucester: Innsworth Wargaming and Roleplaying (WARP). We play *WFRP, AD&D, MSPE* and wargames. Mel Tudno-Jones 01452 854257

● Goblin Horde are recruiting sci-fi and fantasy roleplayers, Wednesday nights, Stockport. Rachel 0161 4561444. James 0973 256276

● The Guild of Melee and Magic – London's biggest club – first visit free, annual membership £5

Central – Jason 0181 7158675
South – Jon 0181 6999654
West – Gerald 0181 9911297
East – Douglas 0181 5535332

● Inverness roleplaying/wargaming association meets Cameron Youth Club, Planefield Rd, Tues, 6-10pm. First two nights are free

● Albion Guard Games Club, Mon/Tue eves, The Plough, Dogs Head St, Ipswich. RPGs/CCGs, wargames and boardgames. Keith 01473 289560

The Albion Guard has been around for eight years. They get up to all sorts of things, apparently.

● Motherwell wargames club meets Tusedays 6.30pm at Newarthill Community Centre. Play *AD&D, Johnny Reb*. Neil 01698 267253

● North Herts wargamers meet Sundays in Old Hale Way, Hitchin. Peter 01462 625054

● Richmond, N Yorks FWG. Mostly GW but expanding. Fridays, 5.30pm, YMCA. Kev 01748 825622, eves.

● Thetford roleplaying club meets Tues/Suns – any RPGs played. Age 16+. Nick 01842 754248

● Travel and Imagine gaming group. Playing *AD&D* and *CoC* in Gosport. James 01705 353723 or 527885

● Wells/Glastonbury/mid-Somerset *Magic* players, Thurs eves. Adam Reynolds, weekdays, 01749 682656

contacts

● Brujah Ancillae searching for Bristol or Bath (area) prince. Please contact Oliver: Temple Cloud, on 01761 452214 any time

● *40k Warhammer Epic* etc. Players wanted 18+ in the Newark Notts area. For details contact Neil Allen on 01636 72800

● Inexperienced gamer wishes to join or start RPG club in Newtownards/Bangor area, Northern Ireland. Ring Stephen on 01247 861345

● Experienced GM – will run, play, eat anything – requires players. 20+,

reader ads

females welcome, Leeds area. Andrew 0113 2533685

● 15 year-old gamer seeks fellows, individuals/group in East Kilbride. Fantasy preferred. 01355 226442

● *AD&D* player wants to join/start group (18+) in Horsham/Crawley. Richard 01798 875551

A letter from Dubai. Daran Plows is desperate. Write to: PO Box 15000, Dubai, UAE. fax: 9714 822058

● Experienced but rusty *AD&D*er seeks contacts (18+) in Stamford. Steve 01780 721098

● Huddersfield player/GM (25) seeks others in area. *CoC, Vampire, AD&D* etc. Wayne 01484 452865. No bigots

You heard him, bigots – you're not welcome here, now scarper.

● Gamers wanted for RPG club in Reigate, Surrey. Sundays and various days. Adrian 01293 784544

● Novice players wanted for range of RPGs (15/16), Burgess Hill, Hassocks. Chris 01444 244921

● Pagan female (16), with a tree obsession, seeks kindred spirits... Nic 01457 873692

arcane *isn't a very tree-ey magazine, but we're sure some of our readers will be interested in trees, if not actually 'obsessed' by them. But they might be by 16 year-old pagan females, of course.*

● Players (age 18+) wanted for sci-fi game on Sunday evenings in central London. Lloyd 01707 659196

● Player/DM (27) seeks same for *AD&D* around Cleveland. Haven't played for two years. Please help! Mike 01642 817430

● Players for mature, experienced GM (new to Harlow). *GURPS, Traveller*, etc. Mike 01279 862295

● SF prince needs COG to cure my Harano. 17 year-old poet living in a basement. Call Neil 0181 9836382

Poets in basements? What's the world coming to? Eh?

● Veteran player (26) seeks group in Harlow/Bishops Stortford. *CoC*, Cyberpunk. Craig 01371 875442

live action

● Manchester. Established non-dye system. On-going campaign. Indoor/outdoor adventures monthly. Fraser 0161 6523368

● *Vampire* LARP in York. Inexperienced players welcome. Jocko, Flat 2, 9 Marlborough Grove, York YO1 4AY. Over 18s only please

Jocko's sorry about the age restriction but thinks the plot might prove a little unnerving for younger players.

● *Mythos* paranormal investigations for *Cthulhu/X-files* modern-day horror LRP. Paul Basham, 43 Oxford Street, Gloucester GL1 3EF

fanzines and PBM

● Cricket PBM. Profits to charity. Graham, eves, 0115 9283114

● Full-colour fanzine. Sci-fi, RPGs/CCGs/PBMs – £3 for two issues. Mark Edwards, 54 Tixall Road, Stafford ST16 3TZ

● New penpal mag needs new members and ads. Details from Gael Bladen-Hovel, 13 Hillside Ave, Silverstone, Northants NN12 8UR

● *Tomb* issue 2 – the vampire quarterly. £2.50 inc p&p. Fiction, news, *Masquerade, Eternal Struggle* CCG, short story, interactive game, colour cover! M W Jones, 40 Hawk Close, Abbeydale, Glos. GL4 4WE

● *Enigma* – new fanzine. Writers and artists needed. Send ssae to Thomas, 19 Southfield Road, Tunbridge Wells TN4 9UH

● *Reunion.* Tolkein freaks only. New *Middle-earth* calenders, weird ideas £1. Martin Baker, 37 Marlborough Court, Newcastle/Tyne NE3 2YY

● *Souls in Isolation* – horror/fantasy zine. £1 + ssae. Gael Bladen-Hovel, 13 Hillside Ave, Silverstone, Northants NN12 8UR

● *Warpstone* – *WFRP* fanzine. Issue 2, £2.50/£9 for 4 issues. John Foody, 10 Colenso Rd, Clapton E5.

● Would like to join adult PBM game. Contact me soon. John Wall, 2 Springfield Close, Westham, Pevensey, East Sussex BN24 5JE

● Writers and artists wanted for new fanzine. Send sae to Ian, 36 Gardner Ave, Bootle, Merseyside L20 6EQ

● Writers/artists for fantasy/sci-fi magazine. Sae to 39 Stoneyfield Rd, Old Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 2HP

Great Scott! Those hippies are in the house again!

messages

● Aura Williams of Clan Tremere. Words are: "Kalis-an butlrunin kara-emarath". Good luck. David T

● Rob Barrett please get in touch with your old mate. Neil, 53 St Clements Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth BH1 4DX

● NEC *Magic* June 96. Big guy in the bar. Missing a basilisk? Phone 01562 743876 after 4pm

● Gonad, Dennis, Zakk, the thief, the master, all gone. Cameron is in chains. Only Billy visits him

● If you want to see Allen the Snotling again, place £5,000 in used £5 notes in a bag of holding and leave by fountain in the Sigil market place. Kalen, Mad Mage of Silverton

● This is Ilmar, chaos rises, our forces vanquished, we need your help, Jack the lad need not apply

● This is the captain of the USS Bozeman. A warp core breach is imminent. All hands abandon ship

● Message to the USS Bozeman: have received your distress signal – you fools! The Space Pirates are coming. Pray now for you are lost

Crikey. They've scuppered their tub and the pirates are coming. Whatever can save them now? Find out on September 6th in next month's exciting episode of... The Reader Ads.

other stuff

● 7,000 pt Eldar Army for *WH40k* with Eldar Codex. Worth £450, sell £150 ono. Chris 01923 852645

● Amiga adventures/RPGs for sale. All originals. Stuart Hardy, 33 Fir Tree Drive, Wales, Sheffield S31 8LZ

● Amiga games for sale. Will work on 500+ or 500. All boxed with instructions. Simon 01243 5112205

You'll be lucky, pal.

● For sale Citadel figures *Bloodbowl, WH40K, Epic*, various armies, mostly old type. Figures cheap! Sam 01225 761312

Please place my free ad under the following heading

- ☐ Games for sale
- ☐ Cards for sale
- ☐ Wanted
- ☐ Clubs
- ☐ Contacts
- ☐ Live action
- ☐ Fanzines and PBM
- ☐ Messages
- ☐ Other stuff

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- All ads are accepted in good faith
- **arcane** reserves the right to refuse or amend ads at our discretion
- We cannot vouch for the quality of goods and services offered in this section
- Under 18s must have the permission of a parent or guardian before placing a reader ad in **arcane**

September 1996

WRITE YOUR FREE AD HERE IN BLOCK CAPITALS, USING ONE BOX PER WORD

Name _____

Address _____

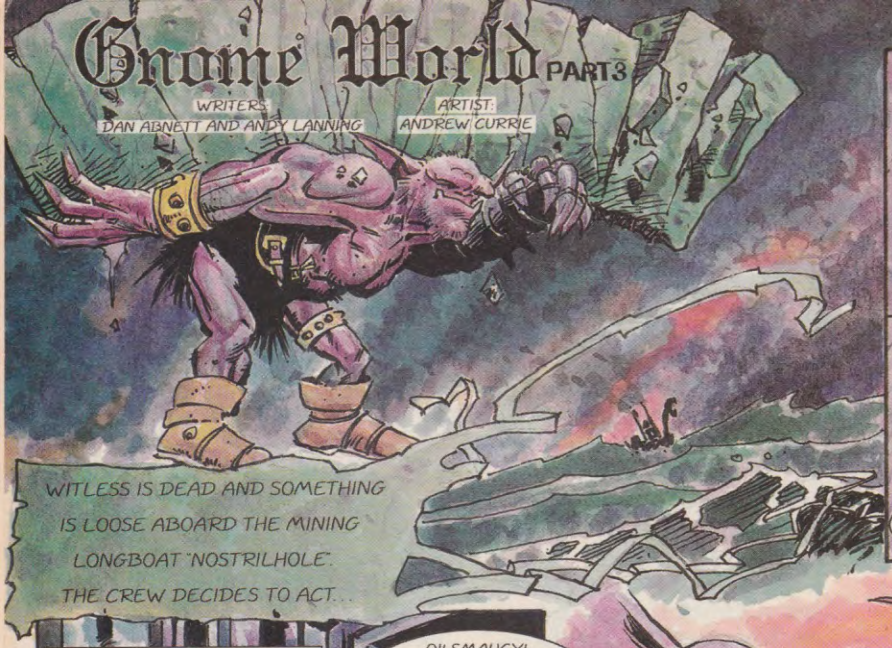
Telephone _____ **Postcode** _____

SEND TO: arcane READER ADS, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BEAUFORD COURT, BATH BA1 2BW

Gnome World PART 3

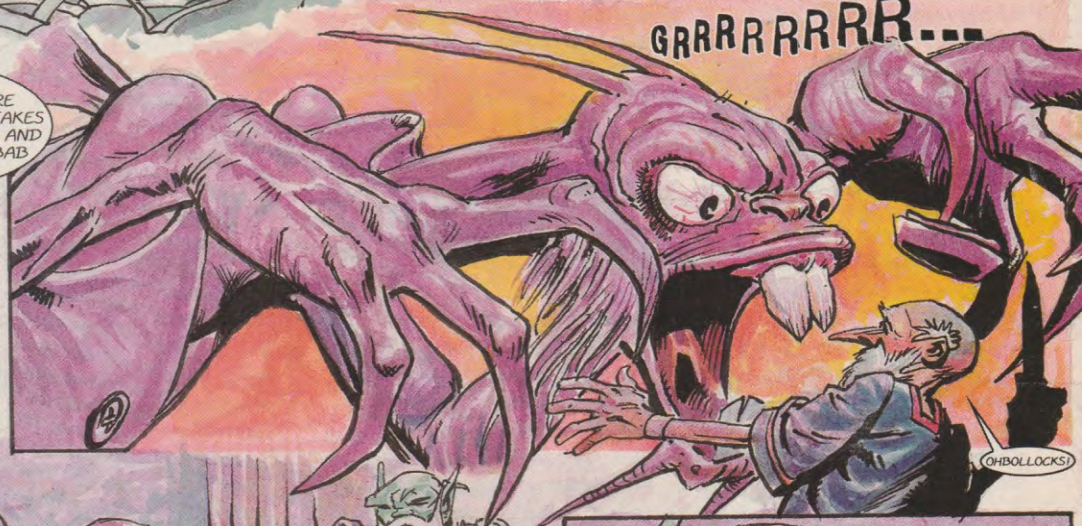
WRITERS: DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING

ARTIST: ANDREW CURRIE

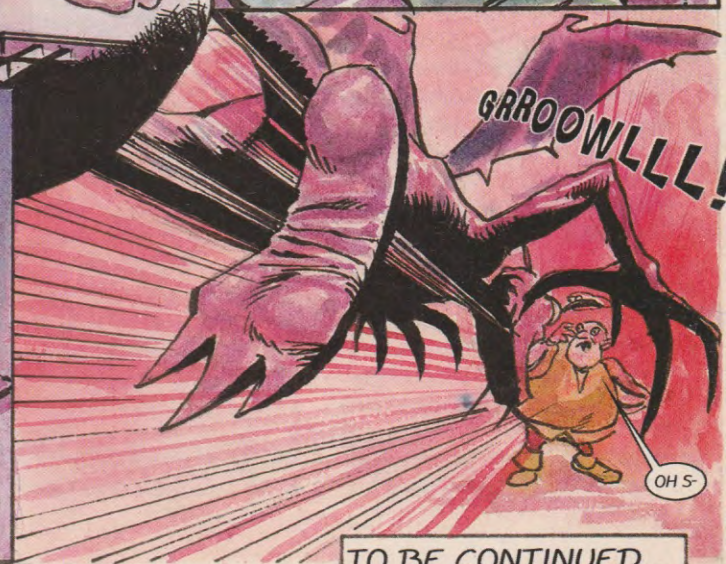


WITLESS IS DEAD AND SOMETHING IS LOOSE ABOARD THE MINING LONGBOAT "NOSTRILHOLE". THE CREW DECIDES TO ACT...

DOWN IN THE TURBINE ROOM...
OI! SMAUGY! COME OUT OF THERE AFORE SOMEONE MISTAKES YOU FOR THE BEASTIE AND MAKES DRAGON-KEBAB OUT OF YERS.
SMAUGY? WHAT'S UP WITH YOU?



SHORTLY...
...IT WUZ BLEEDIN' HUGE. I TELL YOU CAP'N! I GOT ONE GLIMPSE OF IT AFORE IT CARRIED POOR GREEDY OFF INTO THE STEAMPIPES.
THINK OLD GREEDY MANAGED TO STAB IT, THOUGH. THERE'S BLOOD OR SOMETHING...
BLOODY THING HAS GROWED.



TO BE CONTINUED...

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ICE Inc. and Hobbygames Ltd. present *Dicemaster,*™ an exciting new fantasy dice game. Now players can enjoy complete, character-based adventures with nothing more than a beautiful set of custom-crafted dice. *Dicemaster's* tremendous replay value and broad array of intricate die images set it apart from the other dice games on the market. No other dice game offers you so many gaming options, or such wonderful artwork.

Dicemaster employs a customizable collection of beautifully tooled dice, which bear over 100 different, easily readable images. They complement the game's remarkably clean but sophisticated game system.

You can play a fast-paced, stand alone game or call upon the vast supply of extremely varied and flexible expansion sets.

It only takes about fifteen minutes to master the *Dicemaster* rules. Then you just grab your dice, pick a character, and start your quest. Your adventurer embarks on a series of journeys, hoping to be the first to gather the six clues necessary to complete a cryptic mystery. The first to solve the puzzle wins the game. Travel afar, battle monsters, and challenge your opponent with all sorts of clever trouble.

The first three titles in the Dicemaster line include:

- **Cities of Doom**™ (Basic Set)— The ≈8"x 8"x 1" box contains a durable, vacu-formed dice tray, thirty-one 6-sided dice (D6), and one 8-sided die (D8). The set includes five 22mm, seven 16mm, and twenty 18mm dice. Each player will need a Basic Set in order to play the game. Two players can play the "Basic Game" if they each have a *Cities of Doom* set. ($24.95)

- **Wilds of Doom**™ (Wilderness Set) — The ≈4"x 4"x 4" box contains 26 dice, including thirteen 16mm dice, eight 18mm, and five 22mm dice (three 6-siders, one 10-sided die, and one 12-sided die). You also get a dice bag and tray. Two players can play the "Wilderness Game" if , between them, they have one *Wilds of Doom*.($19.95)

- **Doom Cubes**™ (Booster Sets) — Each ≈4"x 4"x 2" box contains a dice tray and 8 dice (including either one 10-sided die or one 12-sided die). Once either or both players introduce(s) one or more *Doom Cubes*, they can play the "Advanced Game." ($5.95)

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Tel:1(800) 325-0479 or (804) 295-4280
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West Sussex, UK BN18 0BD
Tel: +44 0(1903) 730998, Fax: +44 0(1903) 731141
e-mail:hguk@pavilion.co.uk, web page: http://www.hobbygames.com

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